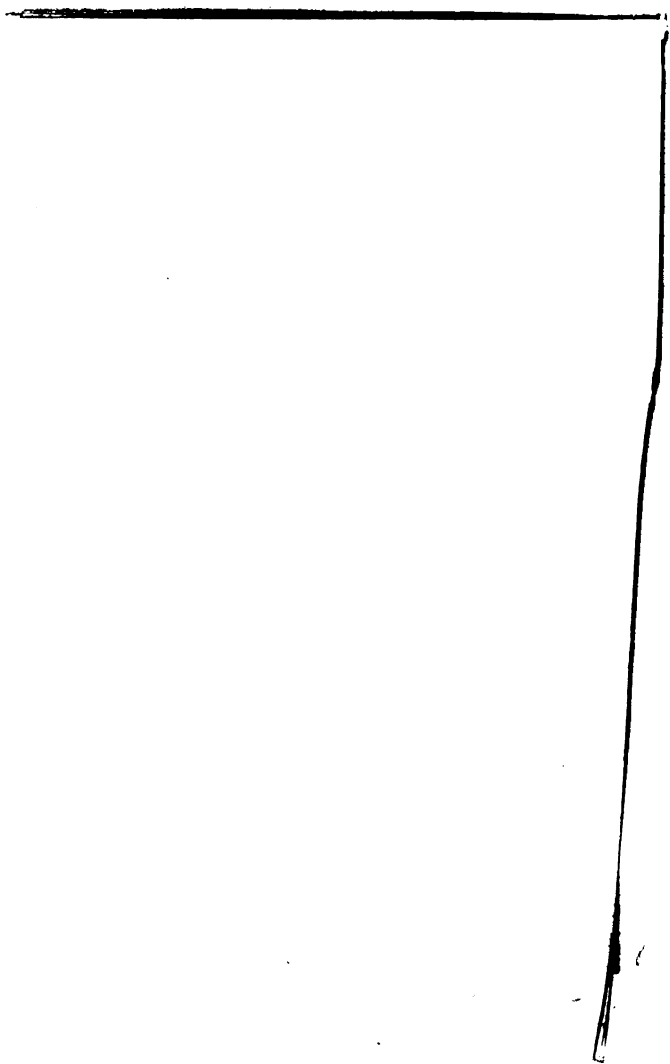




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THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.





THE
ROMAN CATACOMBS;

OR,

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE BURIAL-PLACES OF THE
EARLY CHRISTIANS IN ROME.

BY

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PREFACE.



IN the summer of 1847, I was requested to write a series of letters on the Roman Catacombs for a periodical then about to be published. The letters were written in the following spring, and appeared at various intervals in the *Rambler* of 1848 and 1849. Although they were not written until after many visits to the Catacombs, they did not profess to be anything more than a compilation from the standard works of Bosio, Arringhi, Boldetti, Lupi, Marangoni, D'Agincourt, and Marchi. As soon as they were finished, however, I gave myself up to a more diligent study of the whole subject, not only by a careful re-perusal of these and other volumes, but also by a laborious and systematic examination of the cemeteries themselves.

Day after day, during the winter of 1848-49, I continued to visit all that were in any way accessible; sometimes alone, sometimes with Father Marchi, or the Cavaliere di Rossi, more frequently with M. Perret, who was at that time collecting his materials for the work which the French Government has since published. The more I examined, the more I became convinced both of the importance of these ancient monu-

ments, as illustrating the earliest pages of Ecclesiastical History, and of the insufficiency, and in many respects incorrectness, of those descriptions of them which had hitherto been published in this country. To supply this deficiency, and to put an end, if possible, to that indifference which then generally prevailed among the great mass of English travellers towards these sacred relics of primitive Christianity, I determined to publish in a separate volume a much more detailed account of the Catacombs and their contents, than that which had been sent to the *Rambler*. I spared no pains to make this work as complete and accurate as possible, and already more than half of my task was done, when political disturbances drove strangers from Rome, and obliged me to suspend my labours.

On my return in the autumn of 1854, everything was changed. New monuments of the utmost importance had been brought to light; and the work of excavation, carried on by the command of his Holiness Pope Pius IX., under the direction of a Commission of Sacred Archaeology, was daily revealing more. About the same time, the publication of *Fabiola* effectually destroyed that indifference to the subject on the part of English visitors to Rome of which I had previously complained. Indeed, during the winters of 1854 and 1855, scarcely a week passed without numerous applications from persons who, either through ignorance of the Italian language, or from whatever other cause, were prevented from availing themselves of other more efficient guides, that I would accompany them to the Catacombs. I did so as frequently as I could, and was seldom disappointed by any want of

appreciation of what there was to be seen. Nearly all seemed to find in these subterranean cemeteries an interest far surpassing their expectations ; and a wish was very generally expressed that some account of them should be published in England. It was impossible, however, that I should complete the unfinished MS. of which I have spoken. Not only did other more important duties prevent my having time to finish a work on so large a scale, but also the continual progress of discovery would certainly render any large work very imperfect, even whilst going through the press. On the other hand, it seemed a pity not to make some use of the materials which had been collected, and after two or three ineffectual attempts to consign the whole subject to abler and less occupied hands, I have been persuaded to publish the following pages.

They have been put together principally with a view to two ends : first, to supply the general English reader with a short but trustworthy account of the leading features of the Roman Catacombs ; secondly, to supply the English visitor in Rome with a practical guide to all that is best worth seeing in them. Perhaps these two ends may sometimes have interfered with one another ; on the whole, however, I believe it will be found that, as the earlier chapters of the work provide for those who can see the Catacombs for themselves all the preliminary information which it is essential that they should have in order that they may derive pleasure and profit from what they see, so the later chapters may be read with interest even by those who have no opportunity of making any of the visits which they describe.

After having said thus much by way of apology

for the defective *form* of the following chapters, it only remains to add concerning the *matter* of them, that none of it is the result of original research and discovery, but that all has been received from those profound students of the Catacombs, Padre G. Marchi, S.J., and Cavaliere G. B. De Rossi, through whose kindness I was enabled often to accompany them in their subterranean visits. I have only put it into an English dress, that it might be within the reach of all our countrymen, and so tend to counteract the mischievous effects of certain cheap publications upon the subject which are in circulation among us, and of whose authors it would be charitable to believe that they have been misled by books, and never really visited the places which they have undertaken to describe.

J. S. N.

ST. DOMINIC'S, STONE.

Feast of All Saints, 1856.

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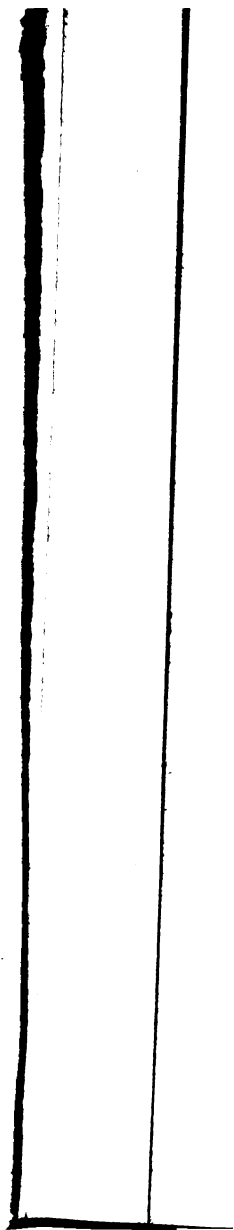
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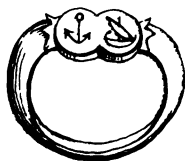




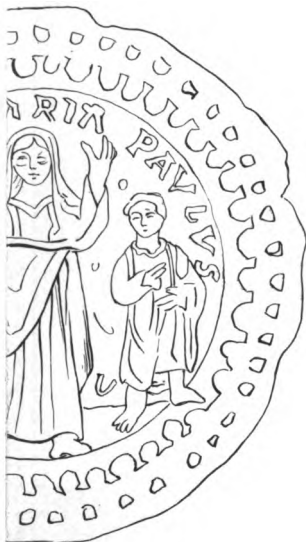


*Spes Dei.
Hope of God,*

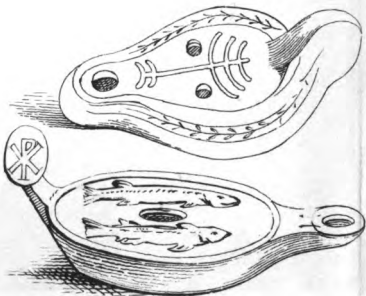
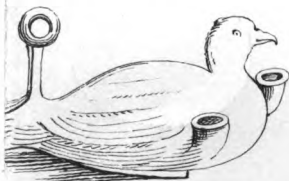
Stamped on several tiles in the Catacombs.



Rings found in the Catacombs



*Chalice, the figures
Gold. See page 112.*



found in the Catacombs.

THE RÔMAN CATACOMBS.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.



HE Roman Catacombs may be briefly described as labyrinths of subterranean galleries, crossing one another in every direction, and here and there opening into chambers more or less lofty and spacious,—the whole hewn, with the most exact regularity, out of the living rock, whose entire walls present a series of narrow shelves one above the other, evidently excavated for the purpose of receiving the bodies of the dead, and afterwards closed with facings of tile or marble, on which were often inscribed the names of the persons buried within.

As to the extent of these excavations, we have not the means of forming anything like a really accurate estimate. Exaggerated theories have been held on the subject, supposing not only that all the Catacombs in the immediate neighbourhood of Rome are connected, but also that they extend far away into the Campagna, stretching to Tivoli on the one side and Ostia on the other; simply, as it appears, because both at Tivoli and at Ostia, Catacombs have been discovered similar

to those at Rome. These theories, however, are sufficiently disproved, both by those accounts of the Catacombs which were written whilst yet their history was known, and also by the nature of the volcanic formation in which they are principally excavated. This soil is so excessively porous, that no excavation in it can possibly have been carried on under such deep and narrow ravines as those which cleave the little wave-like hills of the Campagna, and still less under the river or any considerable body of water; in such situations, the work would be inevitably destroyed by inundation. Still, throwing aside this exaggeration, the real extent of the Roman Catacombs, as far as it can be guessed at, is enough to strike us with wonder.

Our estimate on the subject unfortunately can be but a conjectural one; for it is manifest that, even if we knew—which we do not—the entire length and breadth of the superficial soil undermined by the Catacombs, this alone would not suffice to give us the desired result; for, consisting as they do of a perfect labyrinth of paths intersecting each other in all directions, and, in many instances, repeated in several stories (so to speak) one below the other, all these must be measured, before we can have any real idea of the extent of the work of excavation. The incidental notices in the old Missals and office-books of the Church, and the descriptions given by ancient writers, mention no less than sixty different Catacombs on the different sides of Rome, bordering her fifteen great consular roads. Of these not more than a third part is open to us, and even of those that have been most visited, not one has ever yet been examined in all its ramifications; for the ruin caused by earthquakes and inundations, and still

more by long neglect,—the quantity of soil accumulated in the galleries, and above all, the want of funds to carry on the work on a sufficient scale, present obstacles which it will take a long time to overcome.

We must be content, therefore, to make a merely conjectural statement, founded on certain portions which have really been measured with accuracy. The most perfect map of this kind which has yet been published is of a part of the Catacomb of S. Agnes,* on the Via Nomentana, published under the immediate superintendence of Father Marchi, and it is calculated to contain about an eighth part of that cemetery. The greatest length of the portion thus measured is not more than 700 feet, and its greatest width about 550; nevertheless, if we measure all the streets which it contains, their united length scarcely falls short of two English miles. This would give fifteen or sixteen miles as the united length of all the streets in the cemetery of S. Agnes alone, and, if we may look upon this as a fair specimen of the rest (for it certainly is larger than some and smaller than others), about 900 miles in all the Catacombs taken together.

As to the number of graves which would be contained in this immense extent of streets, it is impossible to speak confidently, for both the height of the streets themselves, and the number of graves in streets of equal height, differ in different cemeteries. Perhaps the average height may be stated to be about seven or eight feet, but in some places it reaches to twelve or fifteen; and always the depth between the several shelves

* A portion of this Map is prefixed to this volume.

or graves varies according to the quality of the soil in which they are dug. Then again, graves of all sizes, of men, women, and children, are mixed together with such irregularity that a good deal of space is often necessarily lost, not to mention the frequent interruptions occasioned by arched monuments (*arcosolia*, as they are called) and by the entrances to the chapels and other chambers. Altogether, therefore, though we may sometimes find, in a few rare instances, as many as thirteen or fourteen graves, one over the other, on the other hand we sometimes find only three or four; so that, taking the average, Father Marchi thinks we ought not to allow more than ten graves, that is five on each side, to every seven feet of road; and according to this calculation, the Roman Catacombs may be believed to contain almost seven millions of graves.

These Catacombs, after having been forgotten for several ages, were discovered towards the close of the sixteenth century, by Antonio Bosio, a Maltese by birth, and an advocate by profession, who had received his education from the Jesuits, and resided in Rome as agent or procurator for the Knights of Malta. He appears to have been interested from his youth in Christian antiquities, and afterwards devoted his whole time and fortune to the exploring this subterranean world, about which public curiosity had been just then somewhat awakened by the accidental falling in of a portion of the high road outside the Porta Salara, which brought to light the Catacomb of Sta. Priscilla. At this discovery "the city," as a contemporary writer records, "was amazed to find that she had other cities unknown to her concealed beneath her own

suburbs, beginning now to understand what she had before only heard or read of." For it must not be supposed but that the Catacombs were known all along to exist, or at least to have existed, though of course none could tell without examination whether or not time and weather, and barbarian ravages, had spared any visible remains of them. The ancient Acts of the Martyrs and other ecclesiastical records not only testified to their existence, but distinctly told, in almost innumerable instances, in what particular Catacomb such and such burials had taken place; and accordingly it was to these ancient documents that Bosio betook himself in order to guide his researches, by ascertaining with some degree of probability where each cemetery was to be found. Having learned, for instance, that many martyrs were buried in a cemetery on the Appian Way, about three miles out of the city, he would set himself to explore, with the utmost diligence, all the vineyards and other places in the neighbourhood, to discover, if possible, where was the original entrance; being sometimes obliged to return again and again to the same spot, searching for it in vain, while yet he had reason to know that the Catacomb existed; while at other times a fortunate accident, such as the giving way of a road, or of a portion of a vineyard, or, it might be, the digging of a new well, or cellar, or pit for extracting sand, would give him unexpected help. But even when the entrance to a Catacomb was discovered, the difficulties in his way were by no means removed, for it was commonly found to be blocked up, and inaccessible without immense labour. At his own expense, and not unfrequently with his own hands, he had

to force a passage through the rubbish which ages of neglect, and various external causes, had accumulated, into the interior ; and here also new difficulties awaited him, from the innumerable windings of the galleries, in which it required the utmost caution to advance many steps without the danger of being hopelessly lost, to say nothing of the chances which frequently occurred of finding the pathway suddenly interrupted by a fall of earth, or laid under water. He tells us that the first time he got into the cemetery of S. Callisto, on the Appian Way (Dec. 10, 1593), he had some difficulty in finding his way out, but on his second visit he carried with him a large ball of twine and a quantity of candles, and thus armed, with a spade or two for digging, and with plenty of provisions, he spent whole days and nights in exploring its innumerable galleries. He was indefatigable, also, in copying the principal paintings he found, and in making drawings of the most interesting chambers, and of other curious and valuable objects he met with in his search, in order to publish to the world the result of his thirty-three years of unintermitted labour ; unfortunately, however, he died before his work was completed, and left his writings and all his property to the Order of the Knights of Malta. Prince Carlo Aldobrandini, at that time ambassador of the Knights at the Court of Rome, showed these papers to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, librarian of the Vatican, by whom they were consigned to Padre Giovanni Severano, an Oratorian. Under the care of this last, the great work was published, with some additions, thirty years after the death of its author, and soon went through a second edition ; but the impatience of the literary

world in general, and of his own patrons in particular, had not allowed the editor time to write the book in Latin, which seems to have been Bosio's original intention, nor to make it as perfect in other respects as he could wish; this, therefore, was left for Arringhi, also an Oratorian, by whom it was accomplished thirty years later; and thus the newly-discovered treasure was introduced to the knowledge of foreigners, and of the world at large.

Since this period, there has been much controversy concerning the Catacombs, and more especially as to the very interesting question, by whom, and for what purpose, they were originally excavated. At the present day, indeed, all who have devoted themselves to the diligent examination of them, may be said to be unanimous in the conviction, that they were the exclusive work of the early Christians, excavated by them for the purpose of sepulture, and used as the general cemetery of the Church during the first ages of Christianity. But as even Bosio himself, and other names of weight following him, held an opinion in some measure contradictory of this, it will be necessary to enter into this subject at some length. Moreover, since certain other theories, set afloat from time to time by writers whose knowledge was altogether superficial, are yet often quoted as if they were of some authority, a notice of some of these also is an indispensable preliminary to any account of the Catacombs which aims at being generally useful, though in themselves they are hardly worth the trouble of refuting.

Bishop Burnet, the historian of the Reformation, who, as far as we know, was the first to

introduce the subject into English literature, does not hesitate to assert* that "those burying-places that are now graced with the pompous title of Catacombs are no other than the Puticoli mentioned by Festus Pompeius, where the meanest sort of the Roman slaves were laid, and so without any further care about them were left to rot;" and, in order to explain the many tokens of Christianity which had been found there, he goes on to conjecture that these same Puticoli became the common burial-place of all Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries; and that, about the same time, a few monks "made some miserable sculptures and some inscriptions, and perhaps shut up the entries into them with much care and secrecy, intending to open them upon some dream or other artifice to give them the more reputation; but that, a few only being upon that secret, either those might have died, or, by the many revolutions that happened in Rome, they might have been dispersed before they made the discovery; and thus the knowledge of these places was lost, and came to be discovered by accident in the last age." A conjecture such as this, gratuitously supposing an imposture of such gigantic character as to involve the forgery of several thousand inscriptions, and this, too, to have been perpetrated in entire secrecy, scarcely needs refuting; still, as it has been repeated even in our own times, we will just observe that open pits, such as the Puticoli are described to us, where bodies were exposed to public gaze, and left to putrefy, to the great annoyance and injury,

* *Some Letters from Italy and Switzerland in the years 1685 and 1686.* Rotterdam, 1687. Pp. 209, 211.

as we are told,* of the whole neighbourhood, can have nothing in common with a regular series of subterranean galleries such as we see in the Catacombs, where every corpse had its own place, carefully hewn out in the rock, and as carefully closed in again with bricks and mortar.

Again, it has been supposed by some that the Catacombs belonged to Pagans and Christians in common; in fact, that they were the general cemetery of the whole Roman people. But that Christians and Pagans should have consented to lay their dead in a common burial-place, every student of antiquity must allow to be antecedently improbable. We know how exclusive the Pagan Romans were in the matter of sepulture, every family having its own mausoleum, and indeed accounting it unlawful to be buried among strangers.† Is it likely, then, that they should have admitted to share their tomb those whom they hated and despised as they did the Christians, —hating them as the enemies of mankind, and despising them as the most contemptible offshoot of the degraded Jews: more especially when we remember the fierce persecutions which were raging from time to time? Surely they never allowed those whom they themselves so remorselessly slaughtered to rest in the same burial-place with themselves. Neither can we suppose that the Christians would have willingly consented to this common sepulture. We need only look into the Old Testament, to see how solicitous were the Patriarchs to choose their place of rest among the faithful: thus we read of Abraham purchasing a

* Horace, Sat. 1,8 ; Festus in verb. ; and Varro.

† Cicero, de Legibus, ii. 22 ; de Off., lib. ii.

burial-place for himself and his family; of Jacob, on his death-bed, requiring a solemn promise from his children not to bury him in Egypt, and of Joseph commanding that his bones should be carried by his people out of that place. And surely under the New Dispensation, the people of God would have been at least equally jealous of the sacredness of their place of rest.* Indeed, what Christian at the present day does not cling to the hope of being buried among his own brethren, and in ground set apart and consecrated for the purpose? And again, since idolatrous rites accompanied Pagan funerals, it is clearly impossible that any Christian should have exposed his own grave or that of those he loved to such contaminating contact.

But, besides this antecedent improbability, it should be remembered also that, with very few exceptions, the custom of the Romans, at least from the later times of the Republic, was not to bury, but to burn the bodies of the dead, and then to inclose their ashes in an urn, and so commit them to their place of sepulture. Consequently, the Pagan burying-places in Rome with which we are acquainted are of the kind called *Columbaria*, or dove-cotes, from the little niches, like pigeon-holes, into which these urns were placed. The graves in the Catacombs, on the other hand, are long and narrow, evidently intended to receive the human body in its full proportions; indeed in some the skeleton may still be

* St. Cyprian specially enumerates it among the enormities of the heretical bishop of Astura, that he not only "frequented the riotous banquets of the heathen," but even "buried his children among profane sepulchres and in the midst of strangers."

seen : nor has there been found in them a single instance of a sepulchral urn, nor of a place in which one was ever deposited.

The evidence on which this theory of a community of sepulture has been grounded is simply this, that in the Catacombs many heathen inscriptions have been found ; an evidence, the weight of which, though at first sight it seems considerable, a little examination will altogether destroy. Let these heathen inscriptions be read, and they will be found in very many instances to be strangely out of harmony with the place where they have been discovered. Some, for instance, though closing the mouths of tombs, are not sepulchral inscriptions at all : others again, which are sepulchral, bequeath in express terms a place of burial to children and servants for many generations, although the graves to which they are attached are only capable of containing each a single body ; of some, again, the letters have been either wholly or partially erased, or filled up with fine cement. Still more frequently the Pagan inscription has been found on the inner side of the slab, with sometimes a Christian inscription on the outer one : or it has been placed sideways or upside down ; but, in every instance where a Pagan inscription has been found in the Catacombs, it has been so placed as in some way or other to denote that it was not intended for the purpose to which it was there put, and that in its present position it has no meaning. Instances of this may be seen in the lately discovered Catacomb of S. Alessandro on the Via Nomentana, where the graves are as yet unopened, precisely in the state in which they were found. There several of the marble slabs which close the graves bear Pagan inscriptions ;

but all the inscriptions are either on one side or upside down, so making it manifest that the slabs were not originally prepared for the places in which they now are, but were taken by the Christians wherever they happened to find them, and used for their own purpose, just as we know to have been done in many other instances. Thus, in the temples of Egyptian Thebes, ancient as they are, travellers tells us, may be traced, by this very evidence of inscriptions, the ruins of other fabrics more ancient still, used for mere materials in building them; thus too the Athenians used pillars and gravestones for building their city walls, and we know what unsparing use has been made in this way of the remains of ancient Rome; the Coliseum, for instance, having served as a quarry from which were drawn the materials of the Barberini Palace.

Thus far indeed all authors of any credit are unanimous: all not only reject the ridiculous idea of the Catacombs being the same as the Puticoli, but all are of one accord in asserting their use to have been exclusively Christian. When we come to inquire further, however, into their origin, we are no longer guided by the same consent of authorities, Bosio himself, as we have already said, and others of great repute who followed in his train, having held a theory on the subject which the increased knowledge of the present day has, we may venture to say, convincingly proved to have been a mistaken one. His idea was, that the Catacombs, or at least that portion of them nearest the surface, were excavated at a period long anterior to the Christian era, and perhaps even to the foundation of the city, being in fact quarries and sand-pits, from

which were drawn the materials of which many of the palaces and public buildings were constructed, and that they were afterwards arranged, enlarged, and rendered available for the several purposes of sepulture, worship, and occasional refuge by the persecuted Christians.

That there were large subterranean excavations existing in Rome and its neighbourhood at the time of the Christian era admits of no doubt, and that they were sometimes used for purposes of concealment is also well known;—we read in Cicero* of a young nobleman being enticed into one of these places, and there treacherously murdered; and in one of these Nero† was advised, in his last extremity, to seek a temporary hiding-place. Indeed, without having recourse to history at all, we have but to look around us, and we may see many such existing at the present day, which may, for aught we know, have existed before the foundation of the city. No one can ride or drive in the Campagna without soon growing familiar with the sight of arched openings in the rocky banks skirting its ravines, which look like entrances into subterranean grottoes; and we know how the hunters in the Campagna complain of the foxes disappearing into these mysterious depths, and being hopelessly lost underground. Probably, also, there may be very many such excavations whose entrances are hidden, having been for centuries choked up by the falling or washing in of soil. Moreover, we do not deny but that some of these old sand-pits were so far connected with the Christian Catacombs, that these last were often excavated beneath them, the entrance to the

* Orat. pro Cluentio.

† Suetonius in Vit. Neronis.

Catacomb being placed, for the sake of concealment, in some remote corner of the sand-pit; but that the sand-pit itself was ever made into a cemetery has been completely disproved by the researches of Father Marchi and others.

In the first place, if we examine any of the sand-pits which are known and acknowledged to be such, and compare them with the Catacombs, we shall see that each of these two kinds of excavation has its own marked characteristics, distinctive of the use for which it was intended. In the sand-pits the passages vary from ten to twenty feet in width, having been made for the transit of slaves and beasts of burden, and even of carts and wagons employed in the transport of the sand; while those in the Catacombs seldom exceed three feet, and are often still narrower. In the Catacombs, moreover, the galleries are straight and regular, and the walls, so to call them, quite perpendicular; and such an arrangement was essential to the use for which they were intended, namely, the excavation of a number of shelves, the one above the other, for the reception of the dead. In the sand-pits, on the other hand, the only object having been to extract the greatest possible quantity of material, the galleries are irregular, and the arch of the roof springs immediately from the ground: in fact, only such portions of the soil are left as it would have been dangerous to remove. A visit to the Catacomb of S. Agnes, on the Via Nomentana, and the sand-pit which lies over it,* will suffice to show, not only how radically different in character they are

* See the Plan at the beginning of this volume: it is drawn on the same scale as the Map of the Catacomb adjoining it.

from each other, but also that, while further excavation might so change the appearance of a Catacomb as to make it look like a sandpit, nothing could change a sand-pit so as to make it look like a Catacomb.

Then, again, the object of making sand-pits or quarries being to procure materials for building, it is obvious that they would only be made where such materials are to be found of quality sufficiently good to repay the trouble and expense of excavation. Now it so happens that the soil in which most of the Christian Catacombs are dug is comparatively without use or value, and in some cases altogether so. In the Catacomb of S. Ponziano, for instance, on Monte Verde, and that of S. Valentine, on the Via Flaminia, the soil is a mere marine or fluvial deposit, made up of earth and sand-shells and pebbles, vegetable and animal fossils, and other heterogeneous materials. For what purpose could excavations have been made here in Pagan times? The work of making them was expensive and laborious from the nature of the soil, which required solid substructions of masonry to resist its tendency to fall in; and, after all, they contained nothing to reward the toil,—neither sand fit for making cement, nor stone that could be used in building. These, it is true, are exceptional cases, almost all the other Catacombs being excavated in the tufa; but it is a curious fact, that their excavators have always chosen by preference just that particular kind of tufa which is comparatively worthless for purposes of building. The volcanic soil of the neighbourhood of Rome is mainly of three kinds: the *tufa litoïde*, as it is called, which is a hard stone, somewhat rough and coarse, but serviceable for build-

ing; the *pozzolana*, which is a pure sand, an invaluable material for giving strength and consistency to cement; and the *tufa granolare*, which is of an intermediate quality, and of much the least value, being too soft and friable to be used in building, or even to bear transport to any considerable distance, and, at the same time, requiring to be broken and crushed before it could be used as pure pozzolana. Now it is in this very *tufa granolare* that almost all the Christian Catacombs are excavated. And if they were originally dug, as we contend, simply for purposes of sepulture, the reasons for the choice are obvious. That miles upon miles of narrow galleries should have been hewn out for the sake of extracting a material so inferior and of such limited usefulness is clearly most improbable; but for the object the Christians had in view, not only was the *tufa granolare* the most favourable, but it was the only one of the three kinds of soil we have enumerated which suited it at all. For this, rocks of pure pozzolana would have been altogether useless, for this sand is so void of solidity that it gives way even under the pressure of the hand, while the *tufa litoide*, on the contrary, is so hard that excavation in it to such an extent would have been too costly and difficult for their circumstances. It was just the *tufa granolare*, useless for every other purpose, which was exactly suited to theirs, having consistency enough to admit the necessary excavations, while at the same time it was not too difficult to work.

These considerations seem to us to demonstrate the fact that the Catacombs were of Christian origin as well as of Christian use; that from the first they were excavated by the Christians, for

the purpose of sepulture. It is often asked, in objection, how so much soil as must have been removed in the process of excavation could have been disposed of without betraying to the Pagans the secret of the work which was going on. But to this there are many satisfactory answers. First, the Catacombs, as we have seen, being often immediately under the sand-pits, the soil, broken and crushed by long subterranean carriage (for many parts of the cemeteries are distant a quarter or even half a mile from any exit to the open air), may have been brought out through the common entrances, as if it had been pure pozzolana, dug in an ordinary way.

Then again, the Catacombs were often excavated under the private property of Christians of the wealthier classes, where concealment was of course comparatively easy. The Acts of the Martyrs tell us of many noble Roman ladies who eagerly craved the privilege of receiving the mortal remains, the "trophies," as they were called, of those who had died for the faith, and burying them in their own ground; and the martyr's grave often became the nucleus of a Christian cemetery for such of the faithful as lived in that neighbourhood. Thus, after the Apostle St. Paul had suffered martyrdom at the *Aguas Silvias*, now the Tre Fontane, on the Ostian Way, Santa Lucina, a Roman matron, buried his body in a field belonging to her, a little nearer to Rome on the same road, and so began the cemetery which afterwards bore her name. The newly-discovered Catacomb of S. Alessandro is an instance of the same kind; and there are numerous others.

Moreover, it would almost seem as though there *had been* sometimes a great difficulty in

removing the soil, for it was not unfrequently transferred to some neighbouring gallery, whose walls had been already filled with as many bodies as they were capable of receiving. Many of the paths were found by Bosio, as they have been also by more recent excavators, obstructed with this broken tufa; and indeed to this day, every visitor to the Catacomb of S. Callixtus may observe the same thing in many of the galleries which he traverses; the paths are filled in this way to the depth of three or four feet; showing indisputably either that it was impossible at that particular period to carry away the soil, or (which answers the purpose of our present argument quite as well), that the labour of removal was greater than any profit that could be made of it when removed. In either case our conclusion is confirmed, that the Catacombs were not a Pagan work, undertaken for purposes of gain, but exclusively the work of Christians.

It has been objected however again, that the Catacombs are far too extensive to have been excavated by a poor and persecuted community such as were the early Christians. But we must remember that several centuries were spent in the work, for we know that it was begun before the end of the first, and continued to the beginning of the fifth; for though, after the conversion of Constantine, there was no longer any necessity for concealment, and many graves were dug in or near the new Basilicas, under the porticos and elsewhere, yet it seems natural to believe that the great majority of Christians still continued to be buried in the ancient cemeteries, hallowed as they were by the sacred associations of the past, and by the relics of countless martyrs; and indeed the

monuments that are found attest that such was the fact. During this last period, as Christianity was the religion of the empire, and the Church had almost unlimited means at her disposal, there was nothing to prevent the work from progressing as rapidly as was required ; and even in the preceding centuries, though the Church was from time to time subject to violent persecutions, yet the number of her children was certainly considerable from a very early period, and grew from age to age with a rapidity which was the theme of thankful boast to Christian apologists, and of lamentation to Pagan orators and historians. They are said in the earliest times, when described as "born but yesterday," to have already filled "every city and town and island," and "to swarm in the camp and the council-chamber, penetrating even to the senate and the palace," so that "nothing was left to the Pagans but their theatres and their temples;" nay, that "the larger half of almost every city was Christian."* Without attempting to reduce these general expressions into precise arithmetical numbers, the mere fact of the Christian religion having become that of the empire, on the conversion of Constantine, with so faint a struggle, is enough to corroborate their truth in the main. Moreover we learn, both from inscriptions and from other sources, that there was a particular class of the Christian community who devoted their lives to this work of excavation ; they were called the *fossores*, or diggers, and are stated by some ancient writers to have been set apart for the work by a special consecration,

* See Tacit. Annal., lib. xv. 44 ; Porphyry, apud Euseb., Præp. Evang., v. 1 ; Plin. Ep., lib. x. 97, ad Trajan. ; Tertullian, Apol., c. 37.

and to have been reckoned as one of the inferior orders of clergy ; by others, however, it is believed that they only constituted a religious confraternity, such as have started into being from age to age, to meet the various needs of the Christian community. As to the difficulty of carrying on such a vast work in secret, perhaps we are disposed to exaggerate to ourselves the amount of secrecy required. That infinite care was taken to conceal from Pagans the details of the Catacombs, and the entrances to them, we cannot doubt ; but neither can we suppose that they were altogether in ignorance that such places existed, and were used by the Christians for sepulture. Indeed we know that the Pagans were aware, not only of the existence of these cemeteries, but also that the Christians were in the habit of congregating there ; for the first act of a new persecution was, in several instances, a prohibition to visit them. Altogether, therefore, though the vastness of the work certainly strikes us with wonder, yet it cannot be considered such as the Christian body could not possibly have accomplished in the course of four centuries ; and that it *was* accomplished by them, and that primarily for the purpose of burying their dead, appears to us to be established by evidence altogether satisfactory.

If we go on to inquire what can have suggested this peculiar mode of burial, the answer is not difficult. Our blessed Lord himself was buried just in this very way,—“in a new tomb hewn out of the rock ;” and such we know was the custom of the Jewish people. Now, a short time before the birth of Christ, Judæa had been made tributary to Rome by the victorious arms of Pompey, and many thousands of its inhabitants had been

transferred to Rome, where a particular district on the right bank of the Tiber had been assigned for their habitation.* We know how justly tenacious the Jews always were of everything connected with their religion, and therefore we may be sure that, in a matter so peculiarly sacred as funeral rites, they would adhere, as far as they could in a strange land, to the customs of their forefathers: and not only would they turn with horror from the funeral pile of their heathen conquerors, but if they could in any way accomplish the laying their dead in rocky sepulchres, such as those of their own distant country, they would spare no toil in their work. And in fact, outside Porta Portese, the gate nearest to their quarter of the city, the indefatigable Bosio, in the winter of 1602, discovered a Catacomb which appears beyond all doubt to have been theirs. It was excavated about half-way up the ascent of Monte Verde, in the *tufa granolare*, which forms the immediate stratum of that southern extremity of the Janiculum. He describes it as exactly resembling in every particular the Christian Catacombs, except that there is a total absence of all emblems exclusively Christian, while the tombs are marked with such representations as the Ark of the Covenant, the seven-branched candlestick of the temple, and other Jewish tokens. The lamps, too,

* We cannot be mistaken in supposing that the *Trans-tyberinus ambulator* of Martial, the dealer in broken glass and similar wares, was an Israelite. Philo Judæus expressly says that the Jews occupied a quarter in Trastevere, and Cicero (*Orat. pro Flacc. Læl.*) speaks of them as living near the *Gradus Aurelii*, which were certainly in that part of the city. The church of San Salvatore in Corte is supposed to retain in its curious title an allusion to the *Curti Judæi* of Horace, *Sat. i. 9.*

and terra-cotta vases, were impressed with the same figures; and in a fragment of a Greek inscription he read the word "synagogue." He adds that the general character of the Catacomb denoted more of poverty than any of the Christian ones, which is what might be expected from the condition of the Jews in Rome, torn as they had been by violence from their own country; neither are there any chambers, as in the Christian cemeteries, fit for the celebration of religious worship, which again is what we should expect, for the Jewish religion was tolerated in Rome. Indeed the fact of this Catacomb having belonged to the Jews is now established beyond a doubt, by inscriptions which have been found since the death of Bosio: and the only question which can be raised is concerning its antiquity, as compared with that of the Christian Catacombs. But it is certain that this body of Jews were settled in Rome before the birth of Christ, and that they must have had some burial-place; and it is very unlikely that they should have forsaken their own mode of burial, whatever it was, to adopt that of the Christians; while it was very natural for the Christians to take a suggestion from them, when there was everything in the practice itself, hallowed as it was by the example of our Lord's burial, to recommend them to adopt it. Moreover, it is to be observed, that unless this stratum of *tufa granolare* had been pre-occupied when the Christians made their extensive Catacomb of S. Pontiano, on this very Monte Verde, they would certainly have taken possession of it, instead of making the difficult and dangerous excavation we have before alluded to in the wretched soil, which is only a higher stratum of the same hill.

CHAPTER II.

INTERNAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE CATACOMBS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THEIR USE AS PLACES OF BURIAL AND OF WORSHIP.



HAVING now, as we believe, succeeded in vindicating to the early Christians the exclusive right to be considered the authors of all those cemeteries known by the name of the Roman Catacombs (for the Jewish Catacomb which has been mentioned is no longer accessible), it will be interesting to enter into further details concerning their internal construction, and the manner of their use.

It has been already insinuated that it seems to have been the wish of our forefathers in the faith to bury their dead, as nearly as circumstances permitted, after the pattern afforded them by the burial of our Lord. He was buried, we are told, "in a new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, wherein never yet had any man been laid;" and so we find that the early Christians never, according to the custom of modern days, returned to use a second time graves that had once been occupied, but assigned to each corpse its own separate place, which was never afterwards usurped by another. Narrow horizontal shelves, excavated in the natural wall of subterranean streets, each shelf sufficiently deep to receive a

human corpse, having a cornice on the outside, against which the heavy tile or marble slab might rest, with which the monument was to be closed,—such are the graves which we see in the Catacombs; and in describing them, we might use literally the words which describe the sepulchre of our Lord, “a new tomb, hewn out of the rock,” in which no corpse was ever laid but the one for which it was originally excavated. Nothing can exceed the simplicity of form of these graves; and indeed, as might be expected, a most careful economy of labour characterizes the whole work; no more soil having been removed than was absolutely necessary for the purpose required. The graves were made wide at the head and narrower at the feet; and, if two bodies were to be buried together, the soil was excavated only in exact proportion, the feet of the one being generally laid by the head of the other. Even now, as we walk along the narrow paths, and examine the contents of the half-opened graves, we see at once how accurately each was made, according to the size of body it was intended to receive; here a mother and child, perhaps, lie side by side, yet neither in length nor in breadth is there a single inch of unoccupied space; there, a skeleton of unusual height just touches each extremity of his grave; elsewhere, in the thickness of the soil which had been left as a necessary support between two graves, a short and shallow hole has been made, barely of size sufficient to receive the body of an infant just born, baptized, and gone.

It is for this reason, also, that we remark a total absence of order and regularity in the arrangement of the several tiers of graves; the Christian excavator had no leisure to attend to

symmetry; he was constrained by necessity to mix persons of every variety of stature (men, women, and children) in utter confusion. There are, it is true, exceptions to this rule; in a portion, for instance, of the Catacomb of S. Cyriaca, the walls are measured out quite with mathematical precision: at one end there are eight graves, one over the other, for the bodies of mere infants; next to these, the same number of graves for children from seven to twelve years of age; then a row suited for adults, but only seven instead of eight, to allow for the increased bulk as well as length of the bodies; and, lastly, six graves of yet larger dimensions. Such instances probably belong to a later period of the Church, when she had more labourers at command, and more leisure to superintend all the details of her work. There are cases to be seen, moreover, in which a methodical arrangement was intended, and in which outlines of the several graves were traced beforehand with chalk or white paint, but the graves themselves have been excavated within the appointed measurement, manifestly because the bodies, when brought to the cemetery, proved to be of smaller proportions.

There is some reason to believe that bodies were not unfrequently brought to the cemetery before the graves were made in which they were to be deposited;* perhaps it was the custom to

* Such at least seems to be the most obvious interpretation of an inscription, now to be seen in the portico of Sta. Maria in Trastevere.

PECORI DVLCIS ANIMA BENIT IN CIMITERO VII. IDVS
JVL. DP. POSTERA DIE MARTVRORVM.

“Pecoris, sweet soul, came [was brought] into the Cemetery

remove them hither immediately after death, as, in many parts of Italy at the present day, the body is carried at once to some church or chapel, where it remains during the night, and is buried on the following day, or sometimes it is deposited in the chapel of the *Campo Santo* itself, before preparations are even begun for digging any grave to receive it. At any rate, then, as now in Italy, burial followed very quickly upon death, one, or at most two days, being the utmost length of the interval between them, as we learn from such of the inscriptions in the Catacombs as mention the date of the death at all as distinct from the burial; and in times of persecution, the bodies were of course carried to these safe hiding-places as quickly as possible. Sometimes, however, the Christians were too jealously watched for some considerable space of time to be able to bring their dead hither at all; in which case they seem to have encased the bodies in lime, and so to have kept them, perhaps, in their own houses; such, at least, appears to be the best explanation that can be given of the large pieces of lime which may still be seen in many of the graves,* having a double impress of the texture of linen upon them, the outside having marks of a coarse kind of linen, the sheet, probably, which kept it in its place and braced it close to the body, and the inside retaining the impression of the fine linen in which the body itself was wrapped.

of the Martyrs on the 9th of July. She was buried the next day."

* Father Marchi mentions them in the Catacomb of S. Agnes; but having been frequently handled without care by numerous visitors, those fragments have almost disappeared. As yet many may be seen in graves in the Catacomb of Sta. Priscilla.

This wrapping the body in fine linen was another point of resemblance between the burial of the early Christian and that of his Lord; a winding-sheet of that, or of some yet more precious material, was always provided for the covering of the dead, as we read in numerous instances;* and Bosio found many entire corpses in the Catacombs still retaining their linen envelopes, of which, indeed, fragments may yet be seen clinging here and there to portions of the broken skeletons. So, too, was it the practice to strew leaves and flowers on the body of the dead, and to sprinkle it with myrrh and other liquid perfumes. When the heathen accused the Christians of being of a severe and unsocial character, neither crowning their heads with flowers nor anointing their bodies with ointment, the ancient apologists replied that they reserved those things for those who had entered into their rest, and that more precious spices had been brought from Arabia and Saba for the burial of the Christian dead than for the incense of the heathen gods. Nothing, however, is now to be found in the Catacombs suggestive of this practice; but Bosio and others, who saw them in a less ruined condition, discovered in some of the graves vases which emitted a very strong aromatic perfume.

With regard to the expenses attendant on this mode of burial, which must have been very considerable, they were no doubt defrayed by the Christian community at large, both in the case of those originally poor and also of those who had become so by giving up their worldly goods to the Church; but with regard to those who had

* Prudentius Cathemer., Hymn x., 48; Peristeph., Hymn iii.; Anastas. in Vitâ Sixti III.; Euseb. H. E.

possessions, as they were required to maintain themselves and all belonging to them during their lives, so they were of course required also to defray the cost of their burial; and accordingly we find in the Catacombs innumerable inscriptions which indicate the providing of a sepulchre by a husband for his wife, a parent for his child, or *vice versa*, brothers and sisters for one another, guardians for their wards, or foundlings for their foster parents. Indeed we find that some of the early Christians provided, during their lifetime, their own place of burial, either purchasing a single and separate place for themselves, or taking the occasion of the death of some near relative to purchase a double grave, half of which was occupied immediately by the deceased, and the other half reserved for themselves. In some of these inscriptions the price of the grave is named, as well as of the *fossor* to whom the money was paid. One of these, belonging to the consulate of Theodosius and Valentinian, or the year A.D. 426, mentions a solidus and a half as the price paid for a single grave; a sum equivalent to about eighteen shillings of our own coin.

We have already mentioned these fossors, the excavators of the Catacombs, who, whether they formed the lowest order of clerics, or were merely a voluntary association of laymen, devoted themselves entirely to this charitable work; and certainly one more self-denying, and at the same time more useful, has seldom been attempted. Not only did they provide places of burial for the dead, and of worship and refuge for the living, but they did all this at the daily peril of their lives; their duties, at least as long as persecution lasted, being a literal repetition of the work of

Tobias, of whom it is written that "he hid the dead by day, and buried them by night;" theirs, in truth, was a service of continual martyrdom,—first, excavating these cold and darksome galleries, and then coming forth to undertake the yet more perilous task of fetching thither the bodies of the dead. They were probably taken from the poorest class, and must have been very numerous, and as they spent their whole lives in the service of the Church, their maintenance, as well as that of their wives and families, must of course have devolved upon her. It was therefore just and fitting that those who were able to pay for their own burial should be so charged that the superfluities of the rich might supply the necessities of the poor, and all might enjoy alike the honour of being buried in the same manner as their Lord. Indeed, this is one of the most striking characteristics of these cemeteries,—that there is no distinction of rich and poor, but that the same unornamented niches received all alike. Those who wished to set some mark upon the grave of their friend or relative, that so it might be distinguished from others around it, either had the name engraved upon the marble slab, or rudely scratched with the sharp end of the trowel in the mortar by which the slab was secured; or a ring, coin, seal, or any other object which came to hand was secured in the same way whilst yet the mortar was wet. Small lamps, also, of terra cotta were similarly attached to many of the graves; and to those of the martyrs a little ampulla, or glass vessel, containing a portion of the martyr's blood. There is abundant testimony in the records of ancient Christianity to the zeal with which the precious relic of a martyr's blood was

collected and treasured in early times, even at great personal risk; and the numerous *ampullæ* which are found in the Catacombs still retain the blood-red stain of their former contents. If the martyrdom was by drowning, or in any other way which did not involve shedding of blood, or if for any other reason no blood could be collected, a palm-branch served the same purpose, of a sign whereby to designate the sacred spot.

With these exceptions, the great mass of the graves in all the galleries are quite alike. Even where private burial-places were provided for particular families, not even these were really separate from the general cemetery of the faithful, and the graves continued to be, for the most part, the same narrow horizontal shelves. A few only, comparatively speaking, are to be found of a less simple character, occupying more space and requiring more labour for their construction. For these tombs the same length of horizontal excavation was begun in the wall as would have been required for an ordinary grave, but, instead of being finished in the shape of a parallelogram, it was formed into that of a low-vaulted arch, the hollow niche thus made being intended, not to receive the body, but to remain open and empty, and in the flat surface thus provided the grave was sunk perpendicularly, and then closed up by a heavy slab of stone or marble, resting on a ledge left expressly for that purpose. These arched monuments were called *arcosolia*,* and were always made sufficiently wide to receive at least two bodies; sometimes even three or four. Father Marchi describes some which contained four

* See Sketch of an Arcosolium, and of an ordinary grave, in Plate I.

bodies, lying side by side at the top ; under these, and separated from them by a slab of marble, three others ; and under that again, below another slab of marble, a single body. These probably constituted the whole of some private family, who had prepared the tomb at their own expense and for their own use ; and it is most probable, indeed almost certain, from a number of inscriptions recently discovered, that all other graves of this kind that were dug in the walls of the galleries, were, in like manner, the property of individuals. Sometimes, too, a whole chamber (*cubiculum*) was appropriated in this way as the private vault, so to call it, of a particular family ; and still more frequently, graves of the ordinary form were prepared of size sufficient to receive several persons together, and known by peculiar names, — *bisomum*, *trisomum*, *quadrisomum*, &c., according as they contained two, three, or four bodies.

Enough has now been said to explain the arrangement of the Roman Catacombs considered as Christian cemeteries ; but although the primary object of their excavation was sepulture, they were also used as places of religious assembly, and of this, too, distinct indications may be found in their internal form and arrangements.

We know, from different passages in the New Testament, that the Christians, from the very earliest times, were in the habit of meeting together in some stated place, for the public worship of God. Lucian, who lived in the time of Trajan, and was therefore contemporary with some of the Apostles, describes them as assembling in "an upper chamber, richly ornamented with gold," which must of course have been in the house of some wealthy Christian, for the Church could not

at that time have built any public edifices of this kind. In the time of the emperor Alexander Severus, however, we read that they took possession of a certain open, unoccupied plot of ground, which had been hitherto used by the *popinarii*, or cooks, and where the soldiers were in the habit of meeting, to eat, drink, and riot, and that they built a church there; that the *popinarii* made a formal complaint to the emperor, who rejected it, and confirmed the Christians in their possession, saying that he would rather God should be worshipped there under any form than that the place should be occupied by such worthless characters. This was on the site of the present Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, which is therefore often called the oldest church in Christendom. After the time of Severus, churches must have multiplied; for, in the nineteenth year of Diocletian, one of the imperial edicts of persecution was "to destroy the churches," which, indeed, according to some writers, amounted at that time to as many as forty. Still, however, persecution being always threatened, it was necessary for the Christians to have some more secret and secure places of meeting, to which they could have recourse when need required; and such they found in the Catacombs.

Besides the subterranean chambers which have been already mentioned as prepared for the burial-place of private families, there are others of the same kind in which it is manifest that the Holy Mysteries were celebrated. These are very numerous, and of different forms and sizes, generally square, or at least rectangular, though in the Catacombs of S. Cyriaca and S. Callisto a few may be found which are circular, octagonal, or of some other unusual shape; and generally two will

be found to have been excavated immediately opposite to one another on the two sides of the gallery, the one probably intended for men, the other for women; for we know that for many centuries it was a rule of ecclesiastical discipline for the two sexes to be separated in the churches, which indeed, as a custom, still prevails in many parts of Italy, Sicily, and other Catholic countries. In these chapels we find an arched tomb, or *arcosolium*, such as has been already described, wherein reposed the bodies of one or more martyrs, and the slab which covered this grave served as the altar. Sometimes the blood-stained vase has been found in these altar-tombs, and sometimes other still plainer indications of the violent deaths of their former occupants; but even where no such tokens exist, we are yet justified in believing, from overwhelming external testimony, that wherever a tomb served as an altar, it was none other than the sacred body of a martyr which lay underneath. Prudentius describes the tomb of S. Hippolytus in the Roman Catacombs as an altar whence "the Bread of Life was distributed to the faithful who dwelt on the banks of the Tiber;" and he makes similar allusions, when speaking of the tombs of other martyrs and in other parts of the world. S. Maximus, also, of Turin, S. Ambrose, S. Austin, and many others, use the same language; and it seems certain that the practice of offering the Holy Sacrifice at the consecrated graves of martyrs has been almost universal in the Church, even from the time when the beloved Apostle, from his exile in Patmos, "saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held," down to our own time, when it

is still required, for the consecration of an altar, that it should have in it some relics of the saints. Nay more, in the case of the subterranean chapels of the Catacombs, it would almost seem as though the chapels had rather been made for the sake of the altars, than the altars for the sake of the chapels; I mean, as though the chambers had been excavated rather for the express purpose of celebrating the Holy Mysteries over the tombs of the martyrs, as an act of distinct and local devotion (on the anniversaries, for instance, of their deaths), than with any intention of their serving, except under the pressure of necessity, for the general gatherings of the faithful, for the largest of them is very small for such a purpose, and most of them will not admit more than a mere handful of worshippers.

Besides the altar, is to be found in several of these chapels that which in modern ecclesiastical language is called the credence-table, on which the elements were placed before being given to the priest for consecration. In the chapels of the Catacomb of St. Agnes, this *prothesis*, as it was then called, generally consisted of a small square shelf or ledge of rock projecting into the chamber, and forming part therefore of the original design of the excavator. In other chapels it was provided for by a niche, or in some other way. Most of these chapels, too, were richly ornamented with paintings and other ornaments; but of these we will not now speak, as the whole subject of the decorations of the Catacombs is of sufficient interest and extent to require separate consideration.

At present it only remains to add a few words concerning another use to which these excavations

were sometimes put, viz., as temporary places of concealment for the bishops and clergy of Rome, and some few others, perhaps, who might happen to be the special objects of search. We read of Pope Alexander I., in the beginning of the second century, taking refuge here, but of course at that time the excavations could not have been very extensive. Nearly a hundred years later, however, about the beginning of the third century, several popes in succession used them as a hiding-place. Here remained for a while S. Callixtus, by whose name one of the largest cemeteries is still known; —in that very cemetery S. Urban baptized the husband and brother-in-law of S. Cecilia, and the others who were converted by her eloquent persuasiveness; and there also took refuge S. Pontian, S. Antherus, S. Fabian, and S. Cornelius, all of whom succeeded one another without interruption in the see of Peter, from the year 198 to 252. At this last date a bitter persecution was raging against the Church, under the order of the Emperor Valerian, who expressly forbade the Christians “to hold assemblies in, or even to enter, those places called cemeteries.” The pope who came next after S. Cornelius (with the exception of S. Lucius, who reigned but a few months) was S. Stephen, and, in spite of this imperial prohibition, he lived for some time in the Catacombs, and there both administered the sacraments and held councils of his clergy, until at length, his place of retreat having been discovered, the ministers of death broke in upon him, as he was celebrating the Holy Mysteries in one of the subterranean chapels; and, after waiting till he had ended the sacrifice, as if struck with a strange reverence, they thrust him back into his episcopal chair, and murdered

him on the spot. S. Sixtus, who succeeded him, was also martyred in the Catacombs; and thirty years later, S. Caius (also Bishop of Rome) lay hid here for eight years, and only came out at last to join the noble army of martyrs. This was during the persecution of Diocletian, and is the last instance of the kind on record under the heathen emperors; but even after Christianity had become the religion of the empire, Pope Liberius (A.D. 359) was glad to take shelter in the cemetery of S. Agnes for a year or more, until the death of the Arian emperor Constantius, and, after him again, S. Boniface I., in the beginning of the fifth century, remained hidden for a time in the cemetery of S. Felicitas, during the troubles consequent on the election of the Antipope Eulalius.

It appears however that, with but few scattered exceptions, it was only the sovereign pontiffs, or other persons peculiarly sought after by the persecutors, who took refuge in these cemeteries for any length of time, and that the idea which has more or less prevailed, that the great body of the faithful, or even any considerable number of them, found shelter here in seasons of persecution, is altogether erroneous. Not only would the difficulty have been insurmountable of conveying sufficient food into these recesses to maintain any great number of people, but there are no chambers there suited to such a purpose, nor any arrangements of any kind which indicate any such design. As places of burial, their characteristics are most distinct, and so also as places of worship, the halls or chambers which abound in them being evidently suited to that end; but there is absolutely no appearance whatever of their ever

having been intended as a dwelling-place, neither do we read of their having been ever used as such, save only, as we have said, occasionally by the sovereign pontiffs, and in some other altogether exceptional cases.

Such, then, was the use to which the Roman Catacombs were put during the earliest ages of the Church; but with the cessation of persecution opens a new era in their history. They were no longer needed as places of refuge when there was no longer any danger to avoid, nor as places of daily worship when churches were rising in every quarter of the city; and they soon gradually ceased to be used as places of burial. But a new and peculiar interest began, on this very account, to invest them, both as monuments of a past period of heroic struggle and suffering, and as a treasure-house wherein were deposited the mortal remains of those who, during that period, had kept the faith at the expense of their lives, and had handed it down safe to those who lived to behold the Church in peace and triumph. Accordingly, for several centuries, the faithful were wont to rush in crowds to pay their devotions in these holy places. "When I was a boy," says S. Jerome, "being educated in Rome, I used every Sunday, in company with other boys of my own age and tastes, to visit the tombs of the apostles and martyrs, and to go into the crypts which are excavated there in the bowels of the earth. The walls on either side as you enter are full of the bodies of the dead, and the whole place is so dark that one seems almost to see the fulfilment of those words of the prophet, 'Let them go down alive into Hades.' Here and there a little light, admitted from above, suffices to give a momen-

tary relief to the horror of the darkness, but as you go forwards, and find yourself again immersed in the utter blackness of night, the words of the poet come spontaneously to your mind : *'Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.'* And Prudentius, describing the cemetery of S. Hippolytus, tells us that "not far from the city walls, there lies hid among the vineyards a deep and darksome crypt; a steep path with winding steps leads you into its hidden recesses, and the light which gains admission through this entrance suffices for a while to guide you on your way. As you advance further through the narrow and intricate streets, your progress is illuminated by an occasional ray finding its way through an opening made in the roof, so that, in spite of the absence of the sun, you enjoy its light far below the level of the ground. In such a place as this lies the body of S. Hippolytus, near to the altar of God; so that the very table from whence is distributed the bread of life is also the faithful guardian of the martyr's corpse; the same slab preserving his bones for the eternal judgment, and feeding the Romans with holy food. Marvellous is the devotion of the place, and the altar is ever ready for those who will to come to pray. I have myself poured forth my supplications there when I have been sick in body and mind, and never have I failed to obtain relief. Numerous are the debts I owe to Hippolytus, for Christ our God has given him power to grant whatsoever any man may ask of him. Hence, from sunrise even to sunset the people may be seen flocking hither to pay their devotions to the saint; and not the Romans only, rich and poor, men, women, and children, but long trains of people from Albano and all the

neighbouring cities ; and even from Nola, Capua, and other more distant places.”

This eager devotion towards the Catacombs produced certain changes or additions to their original construction. It became necessary to provide new and more convenient entrances instead of the original ones, which had purposely been made as narrow and in as retired a situation as possible, for the sake of secrecy ; often, as we have seen, in some concealed corner of a deserted sand-pit. Now, on the contrary, they were made in public, and close to the high-road ; as that by which we descend to the Catacomb of S. Agnes, for instance, on the Via Nomentana : and where many famous martyrs were buried in different parts of the same Catacomb, different entrances were made, leading as directly as possible to the tombs it was desired to visit, as, for instance, to those of S. Cornelius and of S. Cecilia, in the cemetery of S. Callixtus.

Now also were made, if not all, yet certainly most of those *luminaria*,* as they were called, or apertures to the open air, of which both Prudentius and S. Jerome speak ; apertures which were made, not so much for the sake of light, which could be provided more effectually by artificial means, but rather for the sake of freshening the air, and promoting its circulation through those long narrow galleries. Such apertures must have been almost essential to the safety of those who frequented these places ; for, in spite of the excellence of the Roman cement, whereby the tiles which closed the graves have been kept in their places for fifteen hundred years, and even now

* For the Plan of a *luminare*, see Plate 2.

refuse to yield except to extreme violence, yet it seems scarcely possible but that some degree of noisome effluvia should have escaped from such a multitude of corpses collected together into one place, more especially whenever any of the double or treble graves were re-opened to receive those bodies for which they had been reserved; and if we add to this the number of lamps which were continually burning at the corners of the streets, and before many of the graves, and always during the celebration of any religious function, as well as by the heat which must have been produced by anything like a numerous gathering of people within the narrow limits of a subterranean chapel, it is easy to see that the atmosphere of these places would have been absolutely insupportable without some such contrivance. These *luminaria* were generally so arranged as to give air to two chapels at once; the upper opening, or that which broke the surface of the soil, was small—not more than two feet square; but, after a few feet of perpendicular descent, the shaft was cut obliquely, so as to penetrate the roofs of the two chambers, situated immediately opposite one another on different sides of the gallery. It is scarcely possible in the present day to find a really perfect specimen of a *luminare* anywhere throughout the Catacombs, for, during the lapse of ages, they have been gradually filled up, and more or less destroyed; and also, in no small measure, they have contributed to the general ruin of the cemeteries; for it has been through them that torrents of water have poured down into the chambers and galleries, filling them sometimes to the depth of eight or ten feet with a deposit of clay or mud very difficult to be removed. In the Catacombs,

however, of S. Agnes and S. Callisto, they are sufficiently preserved to enable us distinctly to recognize their original form and dimensions.

It was not enough, however, for the Church of the fourth century to improve the means of ventilation in the Catacombs, and to provide more commodious access to the tombs of the martyrs; the subterranean chapels themselves were far too small to receive the crowds who hurried thither, especially on the festivals, or birthdays, as they were called, of the different martyrs; and therefore it became the care of the Christian emperors to raise churches over many of the cemeteries, more or less spacious, according to the greater or less celebrity of the martyrs buried in the Catacomb beneath. Thus, in the reign of Constantine, instead of the subterranean chapel which had been constructed by S. Anacletus over the grave of S. Peter, in the vaults of the Vatican, was built the Basilica of S. Peter, on the very spot where stands the present wondrous edifice. At the same time were built the Basilicas of S. Paul, S. Laurence, S. Agnes, and many more, some of which, or at least buildings on the same site, and bearing the same name, exist, as we know, to the present day; but others were destroyed by the barbarous tribes who, at intervals, poured down upon the city, and have never been rebuilt.

These same barbarous hordes rifled some portions of the Catacombs themselves in the middle of the fifth century, in hopes of finding treasure; and thus began that system of devastation which led ultimately to their neglect and ruin. Pope John III., however, in the year 509, took pains to repair the injuries that had been done to them, and ordered that oblations, candles, and all

other requisites for saying mass at some of their shrines, should be supplied every Sunday from the Basilica of S. John Lateran. Gregory the Great, too, towards the end of the same century, in re-arranging the stations or places of assembly for the faithful on the various holidays of the year, besides the Basilicas and other churches, included in the catalogue many of the Catacombs. Honorius I., also, A.D. 625, Sergius I., about sixty years later, and Gregory III., A.D. 732, all interested themselves, more or less, in preserving and venerating these precious relics of antiquity ; but immediately after the last of these periods came the ruinous invasion of the Lombards, who, rushing down upon Rome, besieged it at several of its principal gates, consumed everything with fire and sword, and finally broke into the Catacombs, and carried off several of the bodies that had been buried there. Pope Paul I., A.D. 761, has left us a most deplorable account of the state of these cemeteries after this sacrilegious invasion. "Many of them," he says, "had been before neglected, and in great measure ruined ; but now, by the impious Lombards, they had been thoroughly destroyed. They had disinterred and carried away many bodies of the saints, in consequence of which the homage due to such holy places was now carelessly paid ; that even beasts had now access to them, and that in some places men had dared to put up folds, and so to convert the consecrated burial-places of Christians into stables and dunghills." It was for these reasons that he considered it more reverent to cause the bodies of the martyrs to be removed into churches and monasteries within the walls,—which was accordingly done.

This practice of removing the bodies of martyrs into churches had begun, indeed, long before. Boniface III., in the beginning of the 7th century, had removed a considerable number to the heathen temple of the Pantheon, when he consecrated it to the service of Christianity, on which account it received the name it has ever since borne, of *Sancta Maria ad Martyres*; and Pope Theodore, also, in the middle of the same century, removed other bodies, on a similar occasion, to the church of S. Stefano Rotondo, on the Cœlian hill. But, after the shock given by the Lombard invasion, this was done on a much larger scale, and so continued increasingly from the ninth century to the beginning of the thirteenth; as a natural consequence of which, general religious interest in the Catacombs proportionably diminished. But even as late as the beginning of the twelfth century, it was still the custom of the devout Romans, on Good Friday, to visit the cemeteries of the martyrs barefooted and in solemn procession; and Peter the Venerable, who lived about the same time, speaks of having seen in Rome very ancient altars and oratories in subterranean crypts, which were often visited, and devoutly kissed and revered by the faithful.

It is from the pontificate of Honorius III., in the thirteenth century, to that of Martin V., in the fifteenth, that all mention of the Catacombs seems suspended, which is sufficiently accounted for by the circumstances of Rome during that troublesome period. The secession of the Popes to Avignon and their long residence there, the turbulence of the various political factions, and the disorganized social state of the city and its neighbourhood, pressed too heavily, and we cannot wonder that,

when all minds were occupied with these distracting matters, the very knowledge of the ancient cemeteries should have perished, except only of such as were entered through some principal church.

Towards the close of the sixteenth century, Onuphrius Panvinus, an Augustinian friar, wrote some account of their numbers and names, but he appears to have gathered these merely from the Acts of the Martyrs, the *Liber Pontificalis*, and other ancient authorities, and not to have personally visited any of the Catacombs themselves. He only reckoned forty-three, in which he was followed by the learned Baronius, about five-and-twenty years later; and no considerable light was thrown on the subject until the labours of the indefatigable Bosio, of which we have already given an account.

When renewed interest in the Catacombs was thus excited in the Catholic world, the practice of translating the bodies of martyrs was resumed, and various Popes granted, from time to time, special privileges for the purpose to different individuals or religious bodies. All these private faculties were subsequently annulled by Clement XI., who desired to reserve the matter more immediately to himself; and his successor, Clement XII., January 13, 1672, made a decree, intrusting the care of all the Catacombs to the Cardinal Vicar of Rome. At a later period they were divided between the Cardinal Vicar and the Pope's Sacristan, under whose direction the work of excavation proceeded; but unfortunately, their object in excavating being only the extraction of relics, they did not aim at so preserving the Catacombs as to enable the antiquarian to study their

form and monuments to the best advantage. This has been done by Father Marchi, under Gregory XVI., and by a Commission of Sacred Archæology under Pius IX., to whom we are indebted for the improved opportunities we now enjoy of examining, in a scientific manner, these precious monuments of antiquity; and the discoveries which are being daily made under their auspices promise most important contributions, not only to Christian archæology, but even to ecclesiastical history.



CHAPTER III.

PAINTINGS IN THE CATACOMBS.



THE subterranean chapels of which we have spoken are in many instances richly decorated with paintings; and some of these, competent judges of ancient art have not hesitated to assign to the first ages of the Church. Such, for instance, was the decision of D'Agincourt, whose opinion on the subject is peculiarly valuable; since he had devoted himself for thirty years to the comparison of the various epochs in the history of the fine arts, and collected illustrations of each epoch from existing specimens, so that his practised eye must have been keen to discern the chronology of a painting. Moreover, he had had the opportunity of examining the then recently-discovered paintings of Pompeii, which had been overwhelmed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, A.D. 79; also the paintings of the Baths of Titus, belonging to the same period, and those of the Tomb of the Nasones, which are of the second century. The decorations of this last, indeed, as also of some *columbaria* belonging to the same period, greatly resembled those of the chapels in the Catacombs, so far as the arrangement and geometrical division of the roof is concerned; and even some of the subjects, or rather the minor details and accessory ornaments, are the same in both. Art, as we know, was in a more flourishing

state for the first two or three centuries after the Christian era than for a very long period afterwards, during which the old classical beauty gradually faded and died out, while that which was destined to succeed it, the new special creation, so to speak, of Christianity, the glory of later ages, had not yet sprung into being. The more skillfully executed, then, of the paintings in the Catacombs, are those to which we must assign the highest antiquity ; for it would be manifestly unreasonable to imagine that the Christians could command for their subterranean chapels an amount of artistic skill greater than is exhibited in the baths, villas, and royal palaces of the same period. There are other indications, too, which, as we are told by students of Christian art, may assist us in forming a judgment as to the respective dates of these paintings : as, for instance, the *nimbus*, or circular auriole of glory, which we see in all mediæval pictures round the heads of saints, was not used until the end of the fourth century, that is, until the downfall of Paganism, from which the idea was borrowed, and universally adopted. Any paintings, therefore, which represent a bishop or martyr with a *nimbus* round his head, must necessarily be referred to a period later than the ages of persecution, and, in many instances, they belong to a period very considerably later ; for, as the Church delighted, as we have seen, in venerating with fervent devotion the heroes of her past age of struggle, it was only natural that she should continue to adorn with painting the tombs in which their bodies reposed. When those bodies were removed into the churches of Rome, there was of course no longer the same motive for decorating the sepulchres ; but until this was

done, *i.e.* until the seventh, eighth, or ninth century (according to the date of the translation of the particular saint in question), the paintings may have been renewed again and again by succeeding generations. Thus we are not surprised to find, in the cemetery of S. Callisto, paintings of S. Cornelius, pope and martyr, and his cotemporary S. Cyprian, both in full ecclesiastical costume, and carrying the book of the Gospels in their hands; of S. Sixtus also, S. Urban, and S. Cecilia in the same Catacomb. All these belong, probably, to the fifth or sixth century; they can scarcely have been later, for a reason which shall be given when we come to speak of that Catacomb in particular.

The great majority, however, of the paintings in the Catacombs are referred by every competent judge of art to a much earlier period. It is true that, in the first centuries of the Christian era, painting seems to have been looked upon by the Church with a watchful and jealous eye, on account of its having been so perverted by Pagan use, that all the associations with which it was then invested were those of idolatry or licentiousness. Nevertheless, it was certainly used among Christians, though cautiously, from the very beginning: we read in Tertullian, who wrote in the second century, of the cups used by Christians being ornamented with representations of the Good Shepherd; and the same authority tells us in what form our Saviour was generally painted. Eusebius, too, mentions the painted images of the Apostles handed down from ancient times, and similar allusions occur in S. Augustin,* as also in

* De Consensu Evang., lib. i. c. 10. See also Tertullian, de Pudic., c. 10; Mabillon, Præf. in iv.; sæc. Bened., § 3.

S. Basil, S. Chrysostom, and other Greek Fathers. There is therefore no antecedent improbability to oppose to the judgment of the competent critics in art, who assign, as we have said, to many of the paintings in the Catacombs, as high an antiquity as the first or second century of the Christian era; nay, there is much, both in ecclesiastical records and the paintings themselves, to approve and confirm that judgment.

The mere accessory ornaments are sometimes the same as are to be found in contemporary Pagan edifices; and all the more important subjects, though of course of an exclusively Christian character, are just such as we should expect to have been wrought in a season of persecution. It is true that there are no representations of the physical sufferings of the martyrs, such as make us shudder at the present day, from the walls of S. Stefano Rotondo on the Cœlian; though we read in Prudentius that such, in his time, were sometimes painted on the sacred tombs: on that of S. Hippolytus, for instance, he saw, as he describes, a picture of that saint dragged by wild horses over the rocky coast of Ostia; but these paintings were certainly the work of the age of peace, not of persecution. During the actual pressure of persecution, it was the care of the Church to spare her children any of these distressing representations, and, if their life on earth was to be one of pain and peril, to surround their place of burial with every image that could suggest cheering and invigorating thoughts, and at the same time to instruct and impress deeply on their minds the soul-stirring realities of that faith for which they might any day be called upon to shed their blood.

Perhaps the subject of all others most frequently

represented in the Catacombs is the Good Shepherd, the very one to the ancient use of which Tertullian bears testimony. Some critics, indeed, have called in question the Christian meaning of this figure, and have supposed it to have been borrowed from an ordinary heathen type, and the tomb of the Nasones has been quoted as presenting a similar picture. It is true of course that, among the pastoral images in which the heathen poets so often delighted to indulge, that most graceful and touching one of a shepherd carrying the tender lambs in his bosom, or bearing on his shoulder an over-weary sheep, can scarcely have escaped them; and it is true also that, in this tomb of the Nasones, there is the figure of a goat-herd, carrying a crook in his hand and bearing a kid on his shoulder. But there is nothing in the details of this figure which suggests any particular resemblance to the Good Shepherd in the Catacombs; on the contrary, there is much to distinguish them. It is clearly an allegorical figure representing Spring, and it fills a compartment in one corner of the vaulting, the corresponding compartments in the other corners being also represented by their appropriate emblems; unlike the Good Shepherd in the Catacombs, it is a naked figure, and is represented as dancing with a nymph, who bears a basket of flowers, there being a pyramid of roses between them. In truth, the very facts which have principally suggested the idea of the Good Shepherd having been taken from a heathen type, are rather themselves proofs of its Christian origin; certainly they are capable of receiving a most exquisite Christian interpretation. Thus, it is objected that the shepherd in the Catacombs is sometimes painted with a goat

instead of a sheep, and with a pipe or some other musical instrument in his hand, which last was the ordinary characteristic of the heathen Pan. But why should not the Christian artist, representing our Lord as the Good Shepherd, give him also all the usual appendages of a shepherd, more especially one which is so suggestive of a spiritual interpretation as to have been actually used by one of the early Fathers? "The Good Shepherd," says S. Gregory Nazianzen, "will at one time give his sheep rest, and at another drive and direct them,—with his staff seldom, but more generally with his pipe;" nay, the words of our Lord himself may be said to breathe the same idea: "My sheep know my voice." So again, that in these pictures a goat is sometimes found, either instead of the sheep, or (more commonly) together with the sheep, may surely be only intended as an additional emblem of the mercy of Christ, and His willingness to receive the repentant sinner,—the sinner, as we know, being always typified in Scripture by the goat. In a very old painting in the Catacomb of S. Callisto, the Good Shepherd stands between a goat and a sheep, but the sheep occupies only the second place, being on his left hand, while the goat fills the place of honour on his right. The history of those early ages gives us the key to this arrangement, which was certainly no caprice of the artist, but involved a deep theological meaning. One of the very earliest heresies which arose to trouble the Church was that of the Montanists, who denied the power of the Church to forgive certain of the more heinous sins. Adulterers, murderers, and apostates might do penance for their offences all their days, and God might here-

after receive them into His favour, but they could never, according to these heretics, be reconciled to the Church ; and we learn from Tertullian himself (afterwards unhappily perverted to the same heresy), that the early Christians used to represent upon their cups this parable of the Good Shepherd for this very purpose, as a testimony against this extravagant severity. A representation, therefore, which seemed to give to the goat a preference, as it were, even over the sheep, was only a natural adaptation of this parable, to illustrate the great Christian doctrine of mercy to the penitent, by interweaving with it that other, more directly bearing on the subject, of the Prodigal Son, in which the returning sinner is welcomed by his Father with "the first robe," and a "ring for his hand and shoes for his feet," so as even to excite the momentary envy of the blameless elder brother. No one, indeed, who has visited the Catacombs, and made himself acquainted with the unmistakably Christian character of most of the paintings there, knowing too that our Lord Himself was pleased to represent Himself to us under this character of the Good Shepherd, and that the early Christians were, as we have said, in the habit of ornamenting their drinking-cups with this image, can possibly doubt the meaning of this beautiful figure, which meets him at every turn, sometimes rudely engraved on the ordinary grave-stones, sometimes painted on the roof or walls of the chapel, sometimes occupying a prominent place in the sculptures of the various sarcophagi, now to be seen in the Christian museums. A shepherd is of course in itself a natural object, and as such may be painted by Pagans and Christians alike ; but it was of the very essence of Christian art to

represent natural objects as embodying some hidden spiritual association; and surely no image was more calculated to raise the courage and warm the affections of those who were called upon to live in the shadow of perpetual danger, than that of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

Next to the Good Shepherd, no subjects are more common among the paintings of the Catacombs than those which typify, more or less directly, the great doctrine of the resurrection, or which record some miraculous deliverance from death or imminent danger. Of this last character was the history of the prophet Jonas, every part of which must have been of singular interest and instruction in the first ages of the Church, and which therefore is of frequent recurrence in her cemeteries. The sudden growth of the tree which sheltered him from the burning sun, reminded the suffering Christian of the power of God to protect His people in extremity, even, if need were, by miracle; then its sudden withering, and the prophet's lamentation, reminded them of their utter dependence upon God, and warned them to avoid the fault of Jonas, and to hold themselves ready at any moment to exchange mercies for trials. Then again, the prophet was swallowed by a great fish, and thus seemed to have perished for ever; yet the very thing which appeared his ruin, was in truth the means of safety: "What seemed perdition," as S. Austin says, "was in truth safe custody;" and his being thrown forth again upon dry land had been quoted by our Lord Himself as a type of His resurrection, and therefore of our own, while it also spoke a general lesson of hope, well fitted to encourage those who were suffering

under persecution. These four scenes from the history of Jonas sometimes occupy corresponding compartments on four sides of a chapel; sometimes only two are found; sometimes all is crowded into a single representation, by causing the fish to cast him out precisely under the tree.* As to the mode in which the details of the subject are treated, it may be worth mentioning that the fish is always represented as a kind of monstrous dragon, which harmonizes well with the interpretation of the fathers, who consider this fish as a figure of the Old Serpent, by whom death came into the world; and as to the tree which sprang up to shelter the prophet, it is not always easy to distinguish to what species it was intended to belong, whether it is most like the ivy of the Vulgate, or the gourd of the Protestant translation. St. Jerome somewhere says that it was a plant which only grows in Syria, and has no really corresponding name in the Latin tongue. Anyhow it is generally represented as twining on trellis-work, probably the booth which Jonas is expressly said to have made for himself on the east side of the city.

Of the same general character are the paintings of Daniel in the lions' den, and the three children in the fiery furnace, which, in like manner, are of very frequent occurrence in the Catacombs. The prophet is always represented in the attitude of prayer—in the ancient attitude, I mean, of Christian prayer; that is, standing with his hands stretched out in the form of a cross. This form, which, as we learn from the Fathers, was universal among the early Christians, is still retained in

* For these, and most of the other subjects mentioned here, see Plate III.

some measure by the priests of the present day in the celebration of mass, by the Capuchins and others in serving mass, and by numbers among the poor everywhere; and it is worth noticing that S. Gregory Nazianzen expressly speaks of Daniel overcoming the wild beasts by the stretching out of his hands, meaning, of course, by the power of prayer; but the expression might almost seem to show that S. Gregory himself was familiar with this usual way of representing him. He is always, as far as I have seen, painted naked; but the three children in the furnace, on the contrary, in accordance with the Scripture account, are always fully clothed, and in the peculiar costume of the East, the Phrygian caps and full trowsers.

The raising of Lazarus is another favourite subject, belonging to the same class, and manifestly most appropriately represented on the walls of a Christian cemetery. In this picture the door of the tomb appears as the front of a temple, probably because such was a common form of sepulchres in ancient Rome; and Lazarus himself is always wrapped in swaddling-clothes, according to the Gospel narrative.

In other paintings, however, the letter of Scripture is far from being so faithfully attended to. Noë in his ark, for instance, with the dove bringing the olive-branch, is of not unfrequent occurrence; but, instead of an ark capable of containing Noë and his wife, and his sons, and his sons' wives, and specimens of all living creatures on the face of the earth, we have a small box or chest, in which is standing a man, or sometimes a woman, stretching out the hand to receive the dove. Manifestly the artist had no intention

of representing the Scripture narrative as such, but simply as a type of something that was still happening in the Christian church; thus, S. Peter, in his epistle, speaks of the Deluge as a type of baptism; and the ark was, we know, always looked upon by the ancient Christians as typical of the Church, wherein we are saved through the waters of baptism. The dove, too, is the constant emblem of the Holy Spirit, by which we are born again in baptism, and the olive-branch is the recognized token of peace and reconciliation; so that the whole representation aptly symbolizes the condition of all Christians, born the enemies of God, but having been by baptism admitted into His Church, and having thus become His friends, and made to be at peace with Him.

Nor is this the only painting found in these cemeteries which has reference to the Sacraments and other ordinances of the Church. On the contrary, as the Catacombs were used not only for the burial of the dead, but also for the instruction of the living, these form, as might have been expected, the subject of a very large and most important class of their paintings. Thus, the sacrament of baptism is often represented in other ways, both figuratively and literally. At one time we see a man catching a fish, in manifest allusion to the apostolic function of fishing for men, and that ancient saying of the fathers, that we Christians are little fish after the model of Jesus Christ, the true fish,* born in water, and only saved through its agency; and then, in the very next compart-

* For the explanation of this, see what follows in p. 60. The passage is to be found in Tertullian, *Lib. de Baptismo*, c. 1.

ment of the roof or wall, we see the same thing represented literally, a man pouring water over the head of another standing naked before him. At another time, the same doctrine is alluded to under another historical type,—Moses striking the rock ; and there are peculiarities in the mode of treating this subject, which are worthy of serious and candid consideration. Moses taking off his shoes before obeying the summons of God which called him up into the mountain, and Moses striking the rock, are sometimes to be found on opposite sides of the same chapel, and sometimes in immediate juxtaposition to one another, actually forming parts of the same picture ; but in a picture of this kind in the Catacombs of S. Callisto, the heads of the two figures of Moses are perfectly different. Moreover, on the bottom of one of the glass chalices found in the Catacombs, this same scene of Moses striking the rock is represented ; but over the head of the person striking is inscribed the name, not of Moses, but of Peter. Lastly, in many of the carved sarcophagi of the fourth and fifth centuries, to be seen in the Museum of Christian Art at the Lateran Palace, the same event is carved in bas-relief, not among the actions of Moses, but of S. Peter. Now we know that Moses was especially typical of our Lord, as being to the old dispensation, in his measure, what our Lord Himself was to the new ; and we know that this particular action of striking the rock was symbolical of baptism, for S. Paul tells us that “ that rock was Christ ;” and everything in the Old Testament that has to do with water is universally interpreted by the Fathers as having reference to baptism and the grace given under the New Law. Christ, how-

ever, did not remain on earth to administer His Sacraments and to preach His law, and these specimens of early art sufficiently testify who it was, in the belief of the ancient Church, that He appointed as His delegate, to be to the New Israel what Moses was to the Old,—their leader and head; even he to whom He specially intrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and gave the solemn charge to feed his sheep.

There is yet another circumstance, also, connected with this subject, which is well deserving of attention. When our Lord is represented in these old paintings as raising Lazarus from the dead, or changing the water into wine, or performing any other miracle, He bears in His hand a rod, with which He is touching the object on which His power is about to be exercised; which rod, we need scarcely say, was a symbol of power, being neither more nor less than the sceptre of royalty. But this rod is by no means placed indifferently in the hands of everybody; in the monuments of ancient Christian art it appears only in the hands of Christ Himself, of S. Peter, and of Moses; indeed we may fairly say, only of Christ and S. Peter, for I do not remember that it ever appears in the hands of Moses except when he is striking the rock, and then, as we have seen, he is the type of S. Peter. An important bas-relief illustrative of this is to be seen in the sculptured front of one of the sarcophagi already alluded to, where, after different miracles of Christ, in which He bears the rod in His own hand, there follows a scene in which He no longer has it, but has resigned it to S. Peter; in fact, the scene simply consists of this resignation, with the cock at the feet of S. Peter, to denote his

fall; a circumstance which the Fathers so beautifully connect with the high office to which he was raised, saying that he was allowed to fall in a way in which no other Apostle fell, because to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven were intrusted, and it was necessary that he should be a penitent, lest innocence should refuse to open the gate to those who had fallen and risen again, whereas one who had only himself entered by means of penitence could not but throw the gates wide open, not only to innocents, but to penitents also.

Another frequent subject of painting in the Catacombs is the healing of the paralytic by our Lord; and a reference to the circumstances of that miracle, and the language used by our Lord on the occasion, sufficiently explain its mystical meaning. The palsied body of the sufferer was to Him who saw both body and soul only a lively image of a soul palsied by sin; and accordingly, instead of speaking first of his bodily ailments, He at once said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;" at which, when the Pharisees murmured, He proceeded to show them, by the miracle of healing, that "the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins." Now if we connect this saying of our Lord with that other (John xx. 23) in which He delegated this same power to his Apostles, we shall see that this miracle afforded a lively image to the faithful of the "power" which yet remained "on earth to forgive sins," namely, in the holy sacrament of Penance. And that this is the sense in which it was actually used is clear, from a painting in the Catacomb of S. Hermes, where, in immediate connection with it, is the administration of that sacrament

represented literally, in the form of a Christian kneeling on both knees before a priest, who is giving him absolution.

But the sacrament which is the subject of by far the greatest number of these ancient paintings is, as we should expect, that central and crowning one, if we may so call it, of the Holy Eucharist. Of this, the feeding of several thousands with a few loaves and fishes is in some respects an obvious figure; the changing the water also into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana becomes, under another aspect, a very lively memorial of the same sort; and both these miracles of our Lord are therefore frequently repeated, more especially the former. And not only is this scene represented historically, but fish and bread are also often brought together in these paintings without any reference to this particular history, as far as we may judge from the number of loaves and fishes or of the people, but simply for the sake of their symbolical meaning. The fish, from the very earliest times, was always taken as a type of our Lord. "Christ, figuratively called the fish," says Origen; and later writers observed how the letters which form the Greek word fish (ἰχθυς) presented the initials of our Lord's name and office, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour; but more especially it was taken as a figure of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. A Greek sepulchral inscription of great antiquity bids us "receive the sweet food of the Saviour of the Saints, taking into our hands the fish;" S. Austin, in his Confessions, describes the Eucharistic feast as that solemnity "in which *that fish* is set before us which, drawn forth from the deep, becomes the food of pious mortals;" and the

"*piscis assus*" of the Gospels, wherewith our Lord fed his disciples by the sea of Tiberias (John xxi. 13), is always by the Fathers held to be mystically significant of "*Christus passus*." "Our Lord," says S. Austin, commenting on this passage, "made a feast for these seven disciples, of the fish which they saw laid on the hot coals, and of bread. The broiled fish is Christ; He, too, is that bread which came down from heaven; and in Him the Church is incorporated for the enjoyment of everlasting happiness, that we all who have this hope may communicate in so great a sacrament, and share in the same bliss." Fish and bread, therefore, when taken together, furnish a very proper secret representation of the Holy Eucharist; the one denoting its outward and seeming form, the other its inward and hidden reality.

Accordingly, in a *cubiculum* in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, close to the tomb of S. Cornelius, and probably of a date anterior to his pontificate, that is, belonging probably to the first half of the third century, a fish, bearing on its back a basket of bread, may be seen twice repeated, as a kind of ornament on either side of one of the principal paintings on the walls. The bread is not of the ordinary kind, in small loaves,—*decussati*, as they were called, *i. e.*, divided into four equal parts by two cross lines,—but of the kind known among the Romans by the barbarous name of "*mamphala*," a bread of a gray ashen colour, which was used by the people of the East, especially the Jews, as an offering of the first-fruits to the priests, and was therefore considered sacred. Within the basket, too, is painted what seems evidently to be intended for a glass chalice full of red wine; and the whole painting brings forcibly to our recollection

tion the description given by S. Jerome of a bishop's treasures, '*Corpus Domini in canistro vimineo*' (for the basket in the painting is precisely of this character, made of osier-twigs), "*et sanguis in vitro.*" "The body of our Lord in an osier basket, and His blood in glass." The sacred bread and the red wine borne by the fish, form a combination, which, we cannot doubt, was typical of the Holy Eucharist.

Another chapel of this same cemetery was the burial-place of several bishops of Rome, from S. Pontianus in the year 235, to S. Melchiades in 314; and in its immediate neighbourhood is a series of chambers designed only for purposes of sepulture, and ornamented with paintings belonging to the same high antiquity. In one of these is represented a table, with two loaves and a fish; and in another, a table of the same kind, with a single loaf and a fish, over which a priest is stretching forth his hands for the purpose of blessing, while on the opposite side of the table stands a woman with uplifted hands in the attitude of prayer. It may be doubted whether this last figure were intended to represent the Church, or only the particular individual buried in an adjacent grave; but we cannot doubt that the whole picture, as well as those in the adjoining chambers, in which seven disciples are seated at a feast consisting only of bread and fish, refers to the Holy Eucharist.

Such, then, are the subjects of most frequent occurrence; but there are several others, also, of peculiar significancy and interest in the circumstances in which the Church was then placed. Thus the Adoration of our Lord by the Wise Men from the East was a favourite theme; and we

can appreciate its value to the early Christians in Rome, both as an expression of thankfulness, inasmuch as they themselves, mostly Gentiles, had been called, like the Wise Men, to the knowledge of our Lord, and also as an earnest that the whole Gentile world, even their heathen persecutors—for whom we cannot doubt that, following their Master's example, they prayed continually—would one day be brought in like manner to His feet. The Wise Men are commonly represented as offering their gifts to our Lord as He sits in His Mother's lap, she herself being also seated. Once or twice they are standing before Herod, with the star over their heads; Herod, however, so directing his eyes as not to see the star. The number of the Magi is not always uniform, but we see sometimes three, and sometimes two, and sometimes even four; but, in these last instances they are represented as standing one or two on either side of our Lady, so that the numbers may not improbably have been chosen only for the sake of order and regularity in the painting.* There are various other events, both of the Old and New Testament, which are sometimes depicted in these cemeteries; but enough has been said to give a general idea of the character of those which are of most frequent recurrence.

Only occasionally may be seen paintings of subjects not taken from the Bible; as, for instance, of single individuals, the martyrs or others buried in the adjacent graves. These are painted

* A very ancient apocryphal tradition, mentioned by S. Augustin and S. Chrysostom, makes them twelve in number. S. Leo the Great, S. Bede, and the Church generally, celebrate three, as being at least the heads and leaders of the rest.

with the utmost simplicity, and always with the arms outstretched in the attitude of prayer. Sometimes the names are painted over their heads, as in a chapel in S. Callisto, where, on the wall over a double altar, are five figures, two women and three men, each with the name and the usual formula "*in pace*," evidently of very early date, for they have no *nimbus*; and, moreover, two or three of them have been cut through, in order to make graves as near as possible to the altar, that is, to the martyrs' tomb. And again, in two or three cemeteries we find paintings of Orpheus playing on his lyre, and charming therewith the birds and the beasts of the forest. It has excited some surprise to find this Pagan figure where all the other pictures are so exclusively Christian; but Orpheus, like the Sibyls, held a kind of exceptional position in Paganism, being said, like them, by the ancient Fathers of the Church, to have prophesied many things truly of our Lord; and we know how common it has been on this account to represent the Sibyls in Christian churches, as in the Ara Cœli and S. Agostino in Rome, at Loretto, on the beautifully carved pavement in the cathedral of Sienna, to say nothing of Michael Angelo's celebrated ceiling in the Sistine chapel. Moreover, Orpheus attracting the birds and beasts, nay, the very rocks and trees, by the music of his lyre, was often quoted as in some sort a type of our Lord, who, by the gracious words that flowed from His lips, softened the hard hearts of sinners, and brought together into one fold a people drawn from among all the nations of the world.

CHAPTER IV.

VISIT TO THE CATACOMB OF S. AGNES.



It has been the fashion with most writers on the Catacombs in modern times to descant much on the difficulty and danger of a visit to the Catacombs themselves; thus, Dr. Maitland talks of the danger of penetrating into them beyond the mere entrances left open to general inspection, and it is sufficiently manifest from his work that this or some other cause had deterred him from making any satisfactory examination of them himself; and the public in general are possessed with vague apprehensions as to the danger of losing their way, of being suffocated with bad air, or crushed by some sudden fall of earth. Other writers, again,—Raoul Rochette for instance,—pronounce all personal visits to the Catacombs to be useless, declaring that books and museums are better instructors than the sight of the cemeteries themselves.

We, on the contrary, most strenuously maintain that nothing will supply the place of a personal visit for those who wish really to understand anything of the subject, even in a merely popular way; and as to the dangers attending such a visit, we earnestly assure our readers that they are purely imaginary. As to bad air, there is none, and in very few places is there any damp-

ness, the Catacombs generally being quite dry, and of a mild and perfectly equable temperature; neither is there any cause, in those Catacombs that are usually visited, to fear a sudden giving way of the soil; and, as you cannot gain admittance to any without being accompanied by one of the regularly appointed guides, to whom, in ordinary prudence, all visitors keep pretty close, there is little or no peril of any losing their way.

These guides being themselves labourers employed in excavating the Catacombs, and these labourers being few in number, and only able to work there for six or seven months in the year, it is not permitted to withdraw them from their work in the week. It is only on Sundays, therefore, and other holydays of obligation, that the Catacombs can be visited by strangers; and, in order to secure the presence of the guide it is necessary to procure a ticket from the Cardinal Vicar, on which is specified the particular Catacomb it is desired to visit, and the hour; as also that the number of the party must not exceed eight, and that they must provide themselves, before leaving the city, with candles, or (what is much better) with the small twisted taper called *cerino*. Having obtained this ticket, the visitors have only to find themselves at the appointed place at the hour fixed, and the *custode* will be there to meet them.

Of course these *custodi*, being mere labourers, are not able to explain things, and the object of the following chapters is simply to enable visitors to know what to ask for, and to understand when they see it. To describe all that is to be seen in each Catacomb would be a long and weary task; it will be sufficient for the purpose at which this little volume aims,—which is merely to assist the

many,—if we point out the principal objects of interest, and the order in which they occur. Those who wish to make a regular study of the Catacombs must of course carry on their researches on a different scale; but for people in general, a very fair idea of them may be gathered by visiting those of S. Agnes, S. Alexander, and S. Callixtus. If it is desired to extend these visits, we would add the Catacombs of SS. Nereus and Achilles, Sta. Priscilla, S. Peter, and S. Marcellinus; or if, on the contrary, there is only time for one, let S. Agnes or S. Callixtus be chosen; it really scarcely matters which, for it is difficult to say which of these two is the more interesting.

Above all things, however, let visitors beware of going to the Catacombs which are entered from the church of S. Sebastian, and then thinking that they have seen enough to form a fair idea of the Roman Catacombs. These are very tempting, as being always open; that is, a *frate* in the adjoining monastery is always ready to act as guide, and it needs no ticket, and none of those previous arrangements which, in the busy sight-seeing life of a Roman winter, are often so troublesome; nevertheless it is important that our readers should know that, though future excavations may bring to light much that is interesting in this cemetery, the small portion now accessible is, as a specimen of the Catacombs, utterly without value. Its only interest consists in its religious associations: here S. Bridget was wont to kneel, rapt in contemplation; here S. Charles Borromeo spent whole nights in prayer; and here the heart of S. Philip Neri was so inflamed with divine love as to cause his very

bodily frame to be changed. And all this happened here, rather than elsewhere in the Catacombs, because the neighbourhood of the monastery caused this cemetery never to be lost sight of. In the days of the saints we have mentioned, it was the only one accessible ; but, for that very reason, because it has been more easily entered, it has suffered even more than others from the devastations of careless, curious, or greedy visitors.

There is, however, one particular spot connected with this Basilica of S. Sebastian which is worth visiting, from historical as well as religious associations ; more especially since it was this spot which was first designated by the name of Catacombs, now universally applied to the whole range of Roman subterranean cemeteries. I mean that low, semi-subterranean building to the left of the church and at the back of the high altar, the history of which is full of interest.

The two apostles, S. Peter and S. Paul, joint founders of the Roman Church, were originally buried, each near the scene of his own martyrdom, the one at the Vatican, the other on the Ostian Way,* on the spot where their respective Basilicas now stand ; but, as soon as the Oriental Christians had heard of their death, they sent some of their brethren to remove the bodies and bring them back to the East, where they considered that they had a right to claim them as their fellow-citizens and countrymen. These so far prospered in their mission as to gain a momentary possession of the sacred relics, which they carried off, along the Appian Way, as far as the

* Caius, a Christian writer of the second century, testifies to their being there in his day.—Euseb. H. E. ii. 25.

spot where the Church of S. Sebastian was afterwards built, about two miles from the city. This was probably their appointed place of rendezvous before starting on their homeward journey by way of Brundisium; for just at this point, a cross-road, coming directly from S. Paul's, joins the Appian and Ostian Ways. Here they rested for a while, to make all things ready for their journey, or, according to another account, were detained by a thunderstorm of extraordinary violence, which delay, however occasioned, was sufficient to enable the Christians of Rome to overtake them and recover the lost treasure. These Roman Christians then buried the bodies, with the utmost secrecy, in a deep pit, which they dug on the very spot where they were. Soon, indeed, they were restored to their original places of sepulture, as we know from contemporary authorities, and there seems reason to believe the old ecclesiastical tradition to be correct which states them to have only remained in this temporary abode for a year and seven months. The body of S. Peter, however, was destined to revisit it a second time, and for a longer period; for, at the beginning of the third century, a capricious fancy took possession of the mind of Heliogabalus, who was emperor at the time, to have a circus made on the Vatican, which would admit of four chariots abreast, each drawn by four elephants. To make this circus, all buildings that stood in the way were directed to be levelled, and, though the Christian cemetery of the Vatican was subterranean, yet there was of course danger that, in the extensive levelling of the soil thus contemplated it might be detected and broken in upon. S. Callixtus, therefore, who was then Pope, in

order to protect the relics of the great apostle from all risk of profanation, caused them to be removed to their former temporary hiding-place, the pit on the Appian Way; and it may have been this circumstance, perhaps, which first induced him to labour so much in the adjoining cemetery that it has ever since retained his name. For the same reasons, too, the Popes who succeeded him were no longer buried, as so many of them had heretofore been, in the Vatican cemetery, but in that of S. Callixtus, that they might continue to be laid as near as possible to the tomb of S. Peter. Perhaps, too, during this period, the Christian flock repaired to this cemetery for religious assemblies, or for refuge in times of danger, more willingly than to any other, as enjoying a sort of pre-eminence over the rest. But in A.D. 257, S. Stephen, the Pope, having been discovered within this very cemetery, and having suffered martyrdom there, it was no longer a safe resting-place for the most precious relic which the Roman Church possessed; for the heathen soldiery having once penetrated, there was no security against a second invasion; and accordingly, in the following year the body of S. Peter was once more removed, and restored to its original tomb in the Vatican, where it has remained ever since.

A hundred years later, when the Church was in the enjoyment of peace and prosperity, she began to commemorate, by the erection of appropriate buildings, all those places which were peculiarly endeared to her by associations connected with her days of persecution. Now arose the basilicas of S. Peter, S. Paul, S. Agnes, S. Lorenzo, and many others; and this spot on the Appian Way

where the bodies of S. Peter and S. Paul had once remained for several months, and the body of S. Peter afterwards for a period of forty years, was not likely to be forgotten. It had always remained isolated and untouched, in spite of the extensive cemetery which, as we have seen, was excavated in its immediate neighbourhood; and now, in the middle of the fourth century, a small oratory or chapel was built inclosing it, begun, as it would seem, during the pontificate of Pope Liberius, and finished by Pope Damasus, who provided a marble pavement for its floor, and, according to his usual practice, set up an inscription in verse, which is still extant, and in which he commemorates some of the events which we have been describing. One half of this building is below the level of the ground, and its architecture is so irregular and bad, that it appears impossible to assent to the opinion of those who assign to it a much higher antiquity, and still less of those who recognize in it an ancient heathen temple. Round the walls in the inside of this building is a low step, or seat, of stone, destined (Father Marchi conjectures) for the use of those who recited here in choir the psalms and public offices of the Church; and in the middle of the area is a small square aperture, widening at the depth of two feet into a pit, measuring about six or seven feet both in length, breadth, and depth, which was that in which the bodies had lain. It is divided into two equal compartments by a long slab of marble, with marble also lining its sides to the height of three feet, while the vaulted roof of the building is covered with paintings of our Lord and His Apostles.

This is the spot to which was originally and ex-

clusively given the name of "the Catacombs," a word the etymology of which it is not easy to decide: S. Gregory the Great, our own Bede, and others, speak of it by that name, and of the cemetery of S. Callixtus as being *very near* the Catacombs. Now, however, as we have already seen, this name is applied to all the ancient subterranean cemeteries of Rome; and as a specimen of these, we must repeat that the cemetery of S. Sebastian is altogether useless. Their leading characteristics can best be studied by a visit to S. Agnes and S. Callixtus, and, if it is intended to visit both, we should begin with S. Agnes.

The very name of this last Catacomb is sufficient to make it an object of peculiar interest, S. Agnes being one of the early martyrs, of whose sufferings and heroism the most detailed accounts have come down to us, and whose youth and noble birth throw over the touching story a charm peculiarly its own. She was, as the Acts of the Martyrs inform us, a young Roman lady of high family and great beauty, as well as large possessions; she was only thirteen years old, and so small and childlike in figure, that no fetters could be found small enough to fit her wrists. The circumstances of her martyrdom are too well known to need repeating: her refusal to accept as her husband the son of the prefect of the city, her exposure to public insult on the spot still shown in the subterranean vault of the church of S. Agnese in the Piazza Navona, her subsequent torture and death, and lastly her burial, by some of her relations, in a vineyard about a mile outside the city walls, on the Via Nomentana. It is over her tomb that Constantine built the church of *S. Agnese fuori le mura*, at the request, it is said, of his

daughter Constantia; and the body of S. Agnes lies immediately under the high altar.

A few years ago, an entrance into the Catacombs was still open from this church; now, however, it is necessary that we should pursue our way along the Via Nomentana somewhat further, to a vineyard on the left-hand side of the road, from which we descend by a staircase, which was constructed, probably in the age of Constantine, for the use of the pilgrims who at that time crowded to visit the tombs of the martyrs. That it was not the original entrance used in times of persecution, is clear, both from its position so near the high-road,—for the old Via Nomentana ran even nearer to it than the modern one does,—and also from the fact that, where it breaks into the gallery, it destroys graves that had already been made; and in truth, if we advance but a few yards along one of the narrow passages which lead into the interior of the Catacombs, we may still read an inscription scratched in the mortar round one of the graves, which gives us the precise date of this portion of the cemetery:—
ABVNDANTIA IN PACE TVR...ANTIA IN
PACE KAL IVNII NEPOTIANO ET FA-
CVNDO COSS,—*i.e.*, A.D. 336.

Other parts of the Catacomb are undoubtedly much more ancient, and, before we take our leave of it, we shall see the original entrance itself, which is probably older than even the time of S. Agnes. For we must beware of supposing that, because the Catacomb bears the name of S. Agnes, it must therefore necessarily follow that it was first executed in her time: the names of the Catacombs are by no means a safe criterion whereby to judge of their relative antiquity.

Some of them, it is true, were made in the days of the saint whose name they bear; thus, the Catacomb of S. Helen, on the Via Tiburtina, was not excavated until the time of that empress, the mother of Constantine, while there is no reason to doubt the Catacomb of S. Priscilla dates from as remote a period as the time of that saint (the mother of Pudens, on whose property it is said to have been dug), that is, as the apostolic age itself. The same may be said of the Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, which, as seems now certain, also belonged to the apostolic age. But, on the other hand, the cemetery of S. Callixtus is of far older date than his pontificate: as we read of martyrs being buried there fifty or sixty years before his time, so that he can only have enlarged and adorned a Catacomb already existing, which therefore became associated with his name; and so in like manner the fame of S. Agnes, the virgin-martyr (diffused, as S. Jerome says, throughout the whole world), caused her name to supersede the more ancient title of the cemetery in which she was buried; just as another Catacomb, on the old Via Salaria, was once known by the name of S. Hermes, then, a century later, by those of S. Protus and S. Hyacinth, and finally, fifty years later, by that of Sta. Basilla.

But to return to our subterranean walk in the Catacombs of S. Agnes. After we have advanced some little way along the galleries, we turn aside to enter one of the subterranean chambers which we spoke of in a former chapter. It is a square apartment, made without bricks or mortar, merely hewn out of the rock like the galleries themselves, and, like them too, its walls are occupied by graves; and at first sight it might almost seem as if this

had been the only use for which it was designed. If, however, we turn round and look towards the door by which we entered, we see on either side a seat rudely carved out of the rock and projecting forwards into the chamber. It is obvious that these chairs could not have been added at a later date, but must have been made at the same time with the chamber itself, and formed a part of the original design; on the other sides of the chamber, too, are remains of a low ledge of the rock, manifestly intended to be used as a seat. Thus the whole appearance of this chamber, when carefully examined, at once suggests the idea that it was intended as a place of instruction to disciples. There is no altar here for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, for the only *arcosolium* in the chamber is much too high to have been so used; moreover, the low seat which ran round the room would have been an obstacle; but that low seat just answers to the idea of a bench for the catechumens, and there is the chair for the teacher,—the *Magister audientium*, as S. Cyprian calls him. That there are two chairs instead of one is no doubt referable to the rule of ecclesiastical discipline of which we have already spoken, which required the separation of the sexes in places of public worship,—a rule the observance of which was likely to be enforced with peculiar strictness in the chambers intended for instruction, as the persons frequenting them were yet unbaptized. In some of the chambers of this kind there is but a single chair, and where men alone were to be instructed, no more was needed; but where women were assembled, the Church, to avoid any occasion of scandal, required the presence of a deaconess, or some other appointed officer, to preside

over them. It still remains to notice another characteristic of this chamber, which fits in precisely with the theory we have advanced as to its use, viz., that it is wholly devoid of painting or any ornament whatever,—the reason of which is obvious, viz., that the doctrines and mysteries of the Christian faith might not be presented, even under signs and symbols, to the eyes of those who were not yet received as members of the Christian household.

Let us pass on, however, from this chamber, or school for catechism, as we may call it, to another chamber at no great distance, and a single glance will be sufficient to detect the different purpose for which it was used. First, one of the *arcosolia* is precisely of the fitting height for an altar, and all round the upper edge of the grave may be still traced the ledge in which the marble slab of the altar was secured; next, in the opposite corner of the chamber, we see that necessary adjunct of a Catholic altar, the credence-table; and lastly, the whole roof is richly ornamented with painting. It is impossible to doubt that this chamber was used for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. As for the paintings, they are much less distinct than very many others in the Catacombs; still they are worth studying, and, with the help of what we have said on the subject of these paintings generally, may be sufficiently recognized. The compartment in the centre of the roof contains the figure of a man seated, and on either side of him, on the ground, is a chest or case, filled apparently with rolls of parchment: probably our Lord between the books of the Old and New Testament; for in the Catacomb of S. Callixtus is a similar painting of our Lord with

the four Evangelists ; there He is Himself giving one of the Gospels to one of the Evangelists, and there are three rolls still remaining in the chest at His feet ; here the composition is more simple, —the Evangelists are not represented, and all the books remain in their chest. In the vault over the *arcosolium*, on the right, is the Good Shepherd, standing between two trees and sheep, and bearing a third sheep on his shoulders ; on one side is Daniel among the Lions, and on the other the Three Children in the fiery Furnace. In the right-hand compartment of the roof or ceiling is Moses taking off his Shoes, and in the opposite one, Moses striking the Rock and the waters flowing forth. In the compartment of the roof nearest the entrance is the Paralytic carrying his Bed ; but the painting of the corresponding compartment on the opposite side is so entirely effaced that it is impossible to distinguish its subject. Besides these principal divisions of the roof, there are other paintings on the corners or ribs of the vaulting, each representing the figure of a person with arms extended in prayer, and on either side of each figure is a sheep. As we know nothing of the history of this particular chapel, no monument having been found to enable us to identify it as the burial-place of any particular martyr, we must be content to remain in ignorance as to who are intended by these figures ; we can scarcely err, however, in supposing them to be the persons, whoever they were, who were buried in this chamber.

Only a very few steps beyond this chapel is another, which presents the same manifest tokens of its use,—the altar and credence-table ; and the paintings are in a far better state of preservation.

The Good Shepherd occupies, as usual, the central or most important place; Adam and Eve, with the tree between them, Moses striking the Rock, and Jonas lying under his tree, occupy three of the surrounding compartments, and in the fourth is seen the figure of a female with her arms outstretched in prayer. This figure is believed to be a representation of our Blessed Lady; first, because the subjects would thus form a consecutive series, beginning with the Book of Genesis, continuing with the Law and the Prophets, and concluding with the Gospel; and secondly, because the same figure (which is very frequently repeated in the Catacombs) is found also on a sepulchral monument of primitive Christianity at S. Maximin, in Provence, where it is accompanied by this legend, "*Maria Ministra in Templo Jerusalem.*" The title here given to our Lady, taken from one of the pseudo-gospels current among the early Christians, instead of one of those expressing far higher dignity, such as Mother of God, which were given her by the Church in later times, attests the great antiquity of the monument; and there does not seem to be anything unreasonable in arguing from the Christian monuments of France to the contemporary Christian monuments of Rome. Besides, if we accept the only other interpretation that can be suggested of the picture in question, and suppose it to represent some individual buried in this chapel, we shall have to account, first, for its position among a series of wholly Scriptural subjects, and secondly, for its repetition; since the portrait of the deceased was clearly painted in its more usual place, namely, at the back of the *arcosolium*, where the fragments of painting still enable

us to recognize it. On the arch of the vault over the same *arcosolium* is a representation of our Blessed Lord sitting with six of His disciples; and all the spaces between the principal subjects on the roof are filled with birds, fruits, vases of flowers, and other ornaments, such as are found in the ancient paintings of Pompeii, and other Pagan monuments.

In the immediate neighbourhood of this chapel an accidental giving way of the soil under an *arcosolium* enables us to look down into a second *piano*, or story, so to call it, of this cemetery, full of graves just like the one in which we are walking, and opposite this tomb is another chapel, with paintings much defaced, but still worth looking at, as giving us subjects we have not seen before. Of a painting at the back of a very lofty *arcosolium* two-thirds cannot now be distinguished, but the remainder seems to represent the five wise virgins, advancing with torches in their hands, and this may suggest to us what the whole scene may have been. Adam and Eve, and Daniel in the Lions' Den, occupy the two sides of the same vault, and on the outer wall, or front of the grave, are the Three Children in the fiery Furnace, and a ship in full sail, from which two of the crew are throwing Jonas into the sea.

The visitor will do well to be content with these as sufficient specimens of painting; for it is very desirable that he should not leave this Catacomb without seeing that which is its special peculiarity, and which makes it the proper starting-point (so to say) for any who wish to study the whole subject scientifically; I mean the *arenaria* or sand-pit, to which we ascend by a staircase hewn out of the rock. As he threads his way, how-

ever, along the very long straight gallery which leads to it, let him observe, in the cement which closes up some of the graves on either side, the figure of a palm-branch, rudely scratched, and in some others the bottoms of small glass bottles, or at least the impression left by such, denoting, as has been already said, the graves of martyrs. He will observe that several of these occur close together; and generally throughout the Catacombs such tokens are to be found in clusters, not singly; for the sword that struck one struck others; multitudes, as we know, having suffered in the same persecution.

But now let us ascend the staircase, and we shall find ourselves still indeed in a subterranean excavation, but in one of a very different character from the Catacombs which we have just left. The utter irregularity of its streets, and their great width, as well as the non-perpendicularity of its walls, at once denote that it is a sand-pit, and not a cemetery. It is on this spot that we should most advantageously consider the different theories that have been advanced as to the origin of the Catacombs, and which we have mentioned in a preceding chapter. Here, remembering the galleries and shelves so carefully excavated which we have just left below, we should call to mind the theory of Bishop Burnet, that the Catacombs were the mere *puticoli*, or open pits, where the vilest sort of Roman slaves were thrown and left to rot. Here, also, comparing those galleries below with those in which we are now standing, we should consider the opinion that has been held as to the identity of the two; and more especially we should study the remarks of Dr. Maitland upon this subject, testing their accuracy by our own personal obser-

vation. "The ramifications of the Catacombs," says that author, "may be classed in two divisions; those originally dug for the purposes of procuring sand, known by their irregularity, as well as by their *smaller* dimensions, and the additions made by the Christians when want of space obliged them either to dig fresh galleries or to square and *enlarge* some of those already existing." Every word of this passage deserves to be studied and confronted with the actual facts of the case as seen in this *arenaria*. Here are subterranean excavations which, it is perfectly plain, were "originally dug for the purpose of procuring sand;" *pozzolana*, not *tufa granolare*, like the Catacomb below, being the material in which they have been excavated; neither do they appear to have been ever used for any other purpose; certainly there is no token of any burials having taken place here, nor, from the nature of the soil, was it possible that graves, such as those in the Catacombs, should ever have been made here. Moreover, these excavations may, as Dr. Maitland truly says, be distinguished from those below by their "irregularity;" for the paths do not cross one another at right angles, and in fact are not worthy to be called paths at all, the sole object of the excavator having evidently been to extract as much soil as possible; but when Dr. M. goes on to speak of their "smaller dimensions," we are disposed to suspect some typographical error (*smaller* for *larger*) until we find the same thing repeated by implication in the next line, where he says that the Christians had to square and *enlarge* the paths already existing when they wished to use them as cemeteries. To square them would certainly have been necessary, for no

shelves capable of supporting bodies could have been made in the blocks of sand as they now are; but as to "enlarging" the galleries, they are already three times as wide as the paths in the Catacombs, and when they had been squared, the disproportion would have been still further increased. A Catacomb, as we have before said, might, by destroying all its graves, be made to look like this arenaria; but by no possible contrivance could this arenaria be made to look like a Catacomb. Again, he insinuates that the Christians only made the fresh galleries for themselves when they had used all those dug by the heathen; "when want of space," he says, "obliged them to dig fresh galleries." How strange, then, that not a vestige of burial has been found in these vast heathen excavations. Surely it needs nothing more than a visit to this Catacomb and arenaria to convince us that they have no claim to be considered as "ramifications of the same plan," but rather that they are as distinct from one another as any subterranean excavations can be.

At the same time we may see the great advantage which the Christians derived from making their Catacombs in immediate connection with an arenaria; for, in one of the irregular streets of the latter, we come suddenly upon a square opening in the floor which descends to the gallery of the Catacomb that we have already traversed, and if we imagine a windlass to have been fastened in this place, what more easy and simple than by means of this opening to remove all the soil displaced by the excavations beneath, and either to deposit it for a while, if necessary, in the recesses of this very arenaria, or, if there were no urgent necessity for such con-

cealment, to cart it off at once as though it had been dug in the arenaria itself. That this was the principal use and object of this shaft there can be no doubt; but if we look carefully, we shall see that there are also holes cut at regular intervals in its sides, by which it would have been possible to descend into the Catacomb; and perhaps some of the primitive *fossore*s may have been obliged, in times of very severe persecution, to block up the staircase by which we ascended, and which was the ordinary entrance, and to descend themselves, and carry the dead bodies which they had to bury, by this more difficult means of access.

As we return into the Catacomb, and retrace our steps along the same gallery by which we came to the staircase, we may observe how long it is before we meet with any cross-roads or any chapels; once or twice, indeed, we may see the outline of a door distinctly marked out in the rock, and that space left free from graves; but, for whatever reason, the excavation was never made. In all probability, the chapels and other chambers were purposely placed as far from the entrance as possible, in the hope of baffling pursuit; as, even should the persecutors have made their way into the Catacomb, they might hesitate before they ventured to penetrate very far into the interior.

There are many other chapels in this Catacomb which deserve a visit, but two in particular no one should leave the Catacomb without seeing; one I will venture to call the Cathedral, and the other the Lady Chapel; and both names will be seen to be strictly appropriate. A cathedral is only so called from its containing the *cathedra*, or

chair of the bishop, and here we have the very *cathedra* in which probably many a Bishop of Rome has sat; it is not, indeed, of stone or marble, richly carved and ornamented like those of later days, but, like other chairs already spoken of in these Catacombs, hewn out of the living rock; and its position sufficiently explains its use. It is at the very end of a long, narrow chapel (or rather of two chapels divided by the path), precisely where the episcopal chair stands at the present day in many of the old Basilicas, at the end of the apse; and there is the same low bench which we see in marble in the Basilicas for the accommodation of the presbytery, here cut, like the chair, out of the rock. Under the chancel arch, for such one may fairly call it, stood, no doubt, the portable altar; so that the Bishop celebrated turning towards the people, as is still done in all the Basilicas; and the two chambers, which together form this chapel (one on each side of the gallery, immediately opposite to each other), might contain about seventy or eighty people; while, over the gallery, is a *luminare*, which served to give to both chambers something both of air and light.

A descent of half a dozen steps, at no great distance, takes us into what we have called the Lady Chapel, because over its altar may be seen a picture of our Blessed Lady with the Holy Child in her arms, or, to speak more accurately, with the Holy Child in front of her, supported by nothing; for our Lady's arms are expanded in the usual form of the cross, as though she were continually praying and making intercession for her children. On the two sides of the same *arcosolium* is the figure of some martyr, who probably

lay buried under the altar ; and, in the centre of the vault, another figure, now not to be certainly recognized, but not improbably that of our Blessed Lord. As to the antiquity of these paintings, they are most likely not so early as those we have already seen in other parts of this Catacomb, for there is the monogram on either side of our Blessed Lady, of which we have no certain example before the time of Constantine ; but neither, in all probability, are they later than the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century, because they have not the aureole of glory which came into general use about that period. They seem, therefore, to occupy a kind of intermediate place between the paintings of the first ages, or the days of persecution, and those of later date, when the Church, in peace and triumphant, adorned the tombs of her famous martyrs with paintings, of which specimens shall be presently described from the Catacomb of S. Calixtus.

And now, though we are far from having seen all that is worth seeing in the Catacomb of S. Agnes, yet at least we have seen what is *best* worth seeing. Those who wish to study the subject more profoundly will, of course, desire to see everything, and such will require help far more extensive than these few pages aim at supplying ; but what has been here described will probably be found sufficient to satisfy ordinary visitors.



CHAPTER V.

VISIT TO THE CATACOMB OF S. CALLIXTUS.



THE Catacomb of S. Agnes, of which we gave a brief description in our last chapter, furnishes us with a good specimen of the subterranean cemeteries of Rome in their primitive simplicity and poverty; but the Catacomb of S. Callixtus, of which we are about to speak, gives us an admirable example of their condition at a later period. Not that this Catacomb is devoid of paintings of early date, but that its peculiar value consists in what we may call its historical monuments.

Both ancient authority and modern research combine to show us that this was the most extensive and important of all the Christian Catacombs; and so rich is it in objects of interest, that the difficulty is what to select, more especially as new discoveries are being made here every day. We must content ourselves, however, with naming a few of the most important points, such as can be comprised in a single visit, and should on no account be omitted.

We will descend then by an old staircase lately restored, close to the now desecrated chapel in which S. Damasus, his mother and sister, were once buried. This staircase leads us immediately to the very central point of attraction and importance in the whole Catacomb. We come

down upon the chamber in which were buried several Popes of the third century; in which we may see the very tombstones of S. Antherus and S. Fabian, who sat in the chair of Peter from A.D. 235 to 250; of S. Lucius, who reigned in 252; and of S. Eutychianus, who died nearly thirty years later.* We shall also see in this place a very long and interesting inscription, set up by Pope Damasus towards the latter end of the fourth century, specifying who lay buried in this chapel, and expressing his own desire to be buried near them, but his unwillingness to disturb the sacred ashes of the saints, wherefore he built the little chapel already mentioned in the open air, immediately above this very spot. For the recovery of this inscription we are indebted to the skill and indefatigable labour of the Cavaliere de Rossi, who put together the hundred fragments into which it had been broken, and has now presented it to us in an almost perfect state, a few portions only being wanting, which he has supplied (in letters of a different colour) from the published collection of Pope Damasus's works, in which this epitaph has always existed.

Before we enter the chapel, however, in which all these things are to be seen, let us cast our eyes for a moment on the stuccoed wall at the entrance, which is covered with innumerable scribbings, the work of devout pilgrims who visited these places in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, and who often recorded here some aspirations to the saint whose shrine they came to visit, or some prayer for the soul for whose sake

* Of S. Cornelius, who came between the two last mentioned, we shall visit the grave in this same Catacomb presently.

they had undertaken the pilgrimage; just as the door of the theatre or walls of the barracks discovered at Pompeii bear the names which the soldiers idly scratched there, or as we may chance to see names and remarks scribbled on buildings at the present day. It would require the patience and practised eye of a De Rossi to decipher many of these scribblings (he has in fact deciphered them all), but some are sufficiently intelligible even to ordinary visitors: such as, SANCTO SUSTO (S. Sixtus was martyred in this cemetery, and buried in the adjacent one of S. Pretextatus), BIBAS EN ΘΕΩ, a curious mixture of Latin and Greek, and several others; others, again, are more clear in neighbouring chapels.

On entering the chapel itself, we see round us the various epitaphs which I have mentioned, and which were gathered but a few years since out of the heaps of soil with which this chapel was then filled, and are now fastened into the wall, merely for the sake of convenience, and not at all with any idea of assigning that particular inscription to that particular grave: the inscription of Pope Damasus, too, which we have mentioned, is placed in all probability where it was first set up, and in front of it may be easily recognized the foundation of the altar with its four pillars.

In the corner of this chamber is an opening into another, the burial-place of many martyrs, and especially of the most celebrated virgin saint of Rome, S. Cecilia.

The legend of S. Cecilia is peculiarly interesting and beautiful, and the truth of its main facts all the research of modern times has tended greatly to corroborate. She was of noble blood and vast possessions, and still in extreme youth when her

parents required her to marry a young nobleman named Valerian, who was of an excellent and amiable disposition, but a Pagan, the maiden being herself a Christian, though of what religion her parents were does not appear. She submitted, however, to their will, though she had already by secret vow consecrated herself to the service of her Lord in the state of virginity; and on the day of her marriage, when Valerian had taken her to his own home, she told him of this vow, by which she was already wedded to a heavenly spouse, and declared to him that an angel of God was ever watching over her, who would certainly avenge her of any one who should attempt to violate it. To this Valerian replied by threatening to kill any earthly lover whom she might prefer to himself; but if she was really protected by an angel, he desired that he, too, might behold him, and in that case he promised to respect her vow. Cecilia answered, that he could not see the angel unless his eyes were illuminated with the gift of faith, through the Sacrament of Baptism, and desired him to go out of the city for two or three miles along the Appian Way, to a spot where he would see some beggars sitting by the wayside, and asking alms; to these he was to give money, to tell them that Cecilia sent him, and bid them conduct him to the old man Urban. This he did; and was taken down into this very Catacomb of S. Callixtus to S. Urban the Pope, who instructed and baptized him that same night. On his return, he found, says the legend, Cecilia praying in her chamber and the angel by her side, and the angel crowned them both with red and white flowers,—the lilies of purity, and the roses of martyrdom. Presently Tiburtius, Valerian's bro-

ther, came in, and, struck with the heavenly fragrance of these flowers, and marvelling, too, whence they came—for it was not then the season of flowers,—inquired concerning them; whereupon his brother told him what had happened, and conducted him in his turn into this same Catacomb, where he also was baptized. After this, Cecilia, her husband and his brother, lived all three together in their palace in Rome, on the very spot where now stands the church of S. Cecilia; and as many were induced by them to become Christians, and as their alms to the poor were boundless, they soon began to be the subject of much talk in the city. Almachius, therefore, the prefect, summoned the two young men before him, and commanded them to sacrifice to the gods. Upon their refusal, they were martyred. Cecilia still lived; and Almachius feared that her youth, her nobility and wealth, and, above all, her boundless charity, which made her greatly beloved among the poor, would excite a tumult, if he proceeded to extremities against her in public; he therefore did as was not unfrequent in Rome when persons of very high rank were to be put to death; he sent executioners to her own palace, with orders to stifle her in the bath, which was extraordinarily heated for the purpose, but in vain. He then commanded that her head should be cut off; but the executioner, though he struck three times, did not sever the neck, and it was unlawful to strike a fourth time. She prayed that she might live yet three days more to complete the transfer of her palace to the Church, and God granted her prayers; and during this interval she continued, says the legend, to persuade many to become Christians, and on the third day quietly composed herself

to her last sleep, after which Pope Urban buried her with his own hands in this cemetery of S. Callixtus, in a chamber "near his own colleagues."

The history of the discovery of her tomb, or rather the connection of the several minute links which form the chain of evidence by which it is identified, is so curious and interesting as to deserve special mention. It had never been forgotten that S. Cecilia had been buried in the cemetery of S. Callixtus, but it had been supposed that the cemetery of S. Callixtus was that to which we gain access from the Church of S. Sebastian, about a quarter of a mile further on in this same road; and a French archbishop, therefore, in the beginning of the fifteenth century, set up an inscription in that cemetery to commemorate the Virgin Saint. The place of that inscription had come, in later times, to be pointed out as the precise spot where she was buried. De Rossi, however, having discovered the chapel which we have mentioned, in which the Popes were buried, was sure that the real tomb of S. Cecilia could not be far off; for, as we have seen, the acts of her martyrdom had told us that S. Urban buried her with his own hands, near his colleagues. Moreover, certain descriptions of the sacred places of Rome, written in the first half of the seventh century, whilst yet the bodies of the Saints buried in the Catacombs lay in their original graves, not having been translated into the churches within the city, distinctly mention that S. Cecilia was buried in the chamber next to that in which were S. Fabian, S. Antherus, and the other Popes. Lastly, we are told of Pope Paschal, who, in the beginning of the ninth century, removed the bodies of those saints, that, searching afterwards

for that of S. Cecilia, he was told in a vision that, when he translated the relics of the Popes in question, she was so close to him that she could have spoken to him, *os ad os*, mouth to mouth. In consequence of which vision* he returned to the search, found the body where he had been told, and removed it to the church of Santa Cecilia, in Trastevere. Thus everything combined to assure De Rossi that he was now in the immediate neighbourhood of her tomb. The chamber, however, was full of earth, even to the very top of the *luminare*, which opened into it; and all this soil had to be removed. As the work of excavation proceeded, there came to light, first, on the wall of the *luminare* itself, representations of three saints, each with his own name inscribed,—Pollicamus, Sabastianus, and Cyrinus,—who are all three named in the itineraries of the seventh century as having been buried in the same chapel with S. Cecilia; then, lower down, on another side of the chamber, and on the wall, appeared a painting of a young lady, very richly attired, and ornamented with bracelets and necklaces, such as might be looked for in a high-born and wealthy Roman bride, and which we can hardly

* This vision forms the subject of one of the interesting old frescoes that may still be seen at the end of the church of S. Cecilia. Pope Paschal found her body quite incorrupt; and so it was also in the sixteenth century, when the shrine was re-opened and the body exposed to public veneration for three or four weeks. The beautiful statue of the saint under the high altar was executed at that time by an artist who, as the inscription itself testifies, himself saw the body, and, as he tells us, sought to express the saint in marble such as he had with his own eyes seen her. See the whole history of the discovery, which is most interesting, either in the Abbé Gueranger's valuable life of the saint, or in the *Acts of the Early Martyrs*: Duffy.

suppose to be other than S. Cecilia. Still further down, on the same wall, was the figure of S. Urban, in full pontifical dress, with his name inscribed; and also a large head of our Lord, represented according to the Byzantine type, and with rays of glory behind it in the form of a Greek cross. The whole character of the painting belongs to a late date, that is, to the sixth or seventh centuries, if not later; but it must have been executed before the tradition as to the exact position of the bodies was lost or obscured, and, it is but reasonable to suppose, before the bodies themselves were removed. All these indications, taken together, put it beyond a doubt that we have now recovered the lost thread of tradition, and are again enabled to identify the sepulchre of the most famous of Rome's virgin saints.

Passing out of these chambers, which are thus proved to belong to the earlier part of the third century, we come to another series, probably of still earlier date, in which are repeated, over and over again, those symbolical representations of the sacraments of which we spoke in our chapter on the paintings of the Catacombs. Indeed, excepting the History of Jonas, which occurs in one of them, and representations of two or three of the *fossore*s, with their instruments of labour, which may be seen in another, I do not remember that there is anything in all these five or six chambers but repetitions of Moses striking the rock; of the water having become a river, and a man fishing in it; of the fish that is caught (that is, a Gentile converted) being baptized; of the paralytic carrying his bed, that is, of the forgiveness of sins; and of the consecration of the Holy Eucharist, and the participation thereof,

figured by the feast of the seven apostles upon bread and fish.

Leaving these paintings, which have been sufficiently described elsewhere, let us penetrate into the interior of the Catacombs till we come to a chapel in which there is a double *arcosolium*, one behind the other, capable together of holding five bodies, and on the wall above the *arcosolium*, very early paintings of the five saints who were buried there, paintings cut through and spoiled in later times by the excavation of fresh graves; but still remaining in sufficient preservation to show the age to which they belong. Each of these saints is praying with hands extended, and over the head of each is his name, with the usual Christian formula; that is, *Dionysios in pace*, *Procopi in pace*, *Zoa in pace*, &c. Between these figures are interspersed birds and flowers, as emblematical of the joy and peace of Paradise; and below, on either side, is a peacock, the emblem of immortality.

Still further in the interior, we come to a chapel, whose paintings, if we may judge from their style, are of yet earlier date, and certainly, from their subject, are far more interesting. The central piece has been cut through, like the last paintings described, by a later grave, but enough remains to leave no doubt as to the subject, and De Rossi's explanation of it is so complete in itself, and fits in so well, both with the details of the painting itself and with ecclesiastical history, that there seems no reason to dispute its correctness. First, the Good Shepherd stands in the middle with a sheep on his shoulders, a goat on his right, and a sheep on his left. We have already seen, from Tertullian, the use that was

made of this parable in the early Church to reprove the undue severity of the Montanists, and how it was often connected with that of the Prodigal Son, who, having repented and returned to his father, was gifted by him with the best robe, with a ring for his hand, and shoes for his feet, so as to throw into the shade for the moment even the eldest brother, who had never left his father's house. It is to apply this consoling truth of God's mercy that the goat is here placed on the right hand. Then again, on either side of the Good Shepherd, an apostle is hurrying forth to gather more sheep into the fold; and here one sheep is turning towards the apostle, another turning his back upon him; a third standing with outstretched neck, in the most intense attitude of attention, while a fourth seems to observe a kind of middle course, not altogether refusing to listen, but, with his head bent down, busily engaged in feeding at the same time. Surely these very aptly image the different dispositions with which different men receive the Gospel message,—some lend a willing ear, and take it in with their whole hearts; others utterly refuse to attend; while others again endeavour to make a compromise between God and Mammon. A passage which De Rossi quotes from an early Christian writer curiously illustrates this interpretation of the painting in question, inasmuch as it compares the poor to sheep in a barren desert, where, having no grass to feed on, they have nothing to hinder their looking up, and seeking after those things that are above; whereas the rich are like sheep in a fruitful and pleasant pasture, with their heads and hearts always intent upon the things of this lower earth. Then, again, a

shower of rain* is falling in abundance over the listening sheep, and more scantily on the one which is bending down to feed, while the one who turns his back is left altogether dry. Surely no one can doubt that allusion is here made to the dews and freshening showers of divine grace. We cannot consider this interpretation of the picture to be fanciful or unwarranted, for every separate detail of it is supported by scriptural or patristic authority, and the artist has only combined them into a picturesque whole.

On the side of the same *arcosolium* is Moses taking off his shoe, and again Moses striking the rock; only the two figures of Moses are essentially different, and that, no doubt, for the reason alleged in a former chapter, that this painting is to be understood not historically, but symbolically: Moses striking the rock typifying St. Peter, to whom were intrusted the sacraments of the Christian Church. And on the other side, broken through, however, and almost destroyed by a niche made to receive a large lamp, is a painting of our Lord, standing between two of his disciples, and multiplying the loaves and fishes. Thus we have the sacrament of Baptism on the one side, and of the Holy Eucharist on the other, while that of Penance, or more properly the whole Gospel scheme, occupies the centre.

It would take us too long to penetrate far enough into the interior of this vast cemetery, to visit the chapel of the Four Evangelists and others; we must content ourselves with another of its historical monuments, which lies at the foot of a staircase by which we may regain the upper

* Or water from the rock,—it is not easy to distinguish which; but, in either case, the sense is the same.

air. I mean the tomb of S. Cornelius, which lies apart from the chapel of all the other Popes, because he was not martyred at Rome, but at Civita Vecchia, and his body was brought to Rome and interred in this cemetery by the private devotion of a noble Roman lady. This tomb is not a simple shelf, like the others, but quite a large deep vault, with an arched roof. One portion of the stone which closed it was found, a few years since, among other monuments in the vineyard above; and, having upon it portions of the letters N E, followed by LIUS MARTYR, De Rossi at once conjectured that it was the tombstone of S. Cornelius. When the Pope had purchased the vineyard, and excavations were begun there under the superintendence of the Commission of Sacred Archæology, the other half of the inscription came to light, and proved his conjecture to be true. The letters ^{CORN}_{EP.} showed, not only that

the martyr here buried was called Cornelius, but that he was no other than the Pope of that name; and even if the title Episcopus had been wanting, there would still have been no doubt of his identity, for on the wall, by the side of the grave, is a painting of the Pope, with his name written at length. Before this had been discovered, De Rossi had already expressed his confident expectation of finding at the tomb of S. Cornelius some memorial of his contemporary and correspondent S. Cyprian. These two saints had been martyred on the same day, though in different years, and their feasts were therefore always celebrated together, just as they are now, on the 16th of September, and the celebration was held at this very tomb of S. Cornelius, as the most ancient calen-

dars and missals assure us. Now, we read in one of the old itineraries, after a description of this spot, that here were buried S. Cornelius and S. Cyprian, which, as we know, is a mistake, S. Cyprian having been buried in Africa, where he was martyred; De Rossi, however, felt sure that something which had been seen or heard at the tomb of S. Cornelius by the pilgrim who wrote the itinerary must have given occasion to the idea. This conjecture was again confirmed in the most remarkable manner; for, by the side of S. Cornelius is another pontifical figure, and the letters of the name which still remain are sufficient to show that this was no other than S. Cyprian himself.

Before these pictures is a low block or pillar, on which may be seen a portion of the marble slab which once covered the whole of it, and on this slab was a large vase of oil, with floating wicks burning, from which the pilgrims used to help themselves at pleasure, carrying oil away as a relic from the shrine of S. Cornelius, just as the poor still do from before the statue of the Madonna at S. Agostino or other celebrated shrines. When the Empress Constantina wrote to S. Gregory the Great, at the close of the sixth century, asking that the head of S. Paul might be sent to enrich a chapel that had just been built in the imperial palace, he refused to comply with her request, on the ground that in Rome they had no custom of breaking or dividing the bodies of the saints; but he went on to specify what relics Rome was in the habit of using and giving away. These, he says, are of two kinds; first, oil from the lamps which are kept burning before the real relics; and secondly, *brandea*, that is, handkerchiefs or stoles, or some other similar articles,

which had been let down to rest on the tomb of the martyr, and, after remaining there a certain time, were sent away as relics, just as the *pallium*, sent by the Pope to the various Archbishops of Christendom, lies on the tomb of S. Peter until it is wanted. In the cathedral of Monza is preserved to this day a parchment roll containing a list of relics sent by S. Gregory to the Lombard Queen Theodelinda, and amongst them is *Ex oleo S. Cornelii*, which must have come from this very spot. These facts are worth noticing, as they tend to explain many of those cases in which different churches claim to have the same body in their treasury of relics. One church, it may be, has the true relic entire, while the other, many centuries ago, received oil or *brandea* sent from that relic; and in later times, after the practice of giving such had died out, a tradition, or perhaps a written document may remain, testifying to their possession of such and such a relic, which they have grown gradually to identify with the body of the saint itself. On the other side of the tomb of Cornelius is a figure of S. Sixtus, Pope, who was martyred in this cemetery, and of another Pope by his side; but for the legend which ran round these figures, as well as for the inscriptions of Pope Damasus above and below the grave itself, and sundry scribblings on the wall, we must be content to wait till De Rossi's great collection of all the Christian inscriptions of Rome during the first six centuries be complete and published.

CHAPTER VI.

VISITS TO OTHER CATACOMBS, AND TO THE CHRISTIAN MUSEUMS.



THE Catacombs of S. Agnes and S. Callixtus suffice to give a good general idea of these ancient cemeteries; those, however, who feel their interest in them to have been excited rather than satisfied by these, will find much to reward their diligence if they visit others also: more especially, they would do well to visit the newly-discovered Catacomb of S. Alexander, situated about seven miles out of Rome, on the Via Nomentana.

Of the history of S. Alexander's life and death we have no really accurate and authentic information, the Acts which have come down to us being generally admitted to be spurious; still these spurious Acts must have been gathered from documents or traditions in great part genuine, for all that has been learnt concerning him from the Catacombs themselves has tended, not to invalidate, but to confirm them. It is certain that S. Alexander was the sixth successor from S. Peter in the see of Rome, that he was martyred A.D. 117, and that two of his companions in martyrdom were S. Eventius and S. Theodulus. The latter was a deacon, of whose history nothing is recorded; the former a priest of great age, as we are told, and venerable appearance, who had himself con-

versed with some of the Apostles, and had converted large numbers to the faith, amongst others the parents of S. Alexander himself. Of S. Alexander the Acts tell us that he was very young, indeed, the judge addresses him as a man only about thirty, and makes use of his youth as an argument to persuade him to apostacy. All three were buried by a noble Roman lady on her estate, at the seventh milestone on the Via Nomentana: Eventius and Alexander together, and Theodulus in another grave apart. The Acts go on further to say, that a bishop was appointed specially for this place, that the Holy Sacrifice might always be offered there.

Now, among the monuments that recent discovery has brought to light, is a considerable portion of the altar, erected probably in the fourth or fifth century over S. Alexander's tomb, which had by that time been made the centre of a basilica, just like the tombs of S. Peter, S. Paul, S. Agnes, S. Lawrence, and others. Round this altar ran an inscription, which is incomplete, one word being wanting at the beginning, which, however, the Acts enable us to supply with confidence: that word was **EVENTIO**; and then the inscription continues,—**ET ALEXANDRO DEDICATUS VOTUM POSUIT CONSECRANTE URSO EPISCOPO**. The Acts explain to us what would otherwise have been a perplexity, how the altar came to be consecrated by a bishop whose name does not appear among the list of bishops of Rome; also, why the second place only is given in this inscription to Alexander, though the superior in dignity; and lastly, why two names, not three, appear in the inscription. In another part of this basilica may be seen a chapel,

which, from the material and elaborate pattern of the pavement, it is clear was once very richly ornamented, and must therefore have been the burial-place of some great saint ; and there, too, a fragment of an inscription gives us the word MARTYR. Are we wrong in conjecturing that here lay the martyr Theodulus ?

A study of the inscriptions still remaining in the pavement of this old basilica, will furnish us with monuments of the several grades of the hierarchy, from bishop to sub-deacon ; and the dates, which are often specified, are all of the middle or latter end of the fifth century. They do not therefore properly belong to our subject, which is the Catacombs themselves, not the churches which were built over them ; so let us enter at once the Catacomb itself. It is small and irregular, and bears evident tokens of unskilful workmanship, as compared with those nearer to the metropolis. Only one or two inscriptions have been found engraved on the marble slabs ; the others (and they are not many) are scratched in the mortar. But what renders this cemetery an object of interest is that the larger number of the graves remain closed, just as they were left sixteen hundred years ago ; and before some of them may still be seen the terra cotta lamp, or the little vessel of bloodstained glass, undisturbed from the nest of mortar in which it was secured by the first Christians. Here, too, may be seen several Pagan tombstones or other monuments, used for Christian purposes ; and they are either turned upside down or set up sideways, or otherwise disposed of in one of those ways already described, as showing clearly that they were used simply as material, not for the

sake of the inscriptions, which, on the contrary, it was attempted to render practically illegible. There are no paintings here, except one or two in front of particular graves, with inscriptions such as, *Spiritus tuus in bono quiescat : May your spirit rest in good*, that is, in God ; and as far as the excavation has yet proceeded, no chapels have been discovered, excepting the great basilica, so to call it, itself. In fact, this was a very small country cemetery ; nevertheless, for the reasons already given, it well deserves a visit.

The Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, at the Tor Marancia, on the Via Ardeatina, is interesting, both on account of the architecture of some of its chapels, its paintings, and its inscriptions. Here also S. Gregory the Great delivered one of his Homilies ; the same which Baronius erroneously supposed him to have delivered in the church dedicated to those saints within the city. The Holy Pontiff expressly mentions his being then present before the bodies of the saints of whom he spoke ; but they had not at his time been translated from their original resting-places in the Catacombs. Their sepulchre was in all probability in that chapel to which we descend by so magnificent a staircase, and which is illumined by so fine a *luminare* ; for that this is the central point of attraction in the cemetery is clear, both from the staircase and *luminare* just mentioned, as also from the greater width of the adjacent galleries and other similar tokens. There is a higher and more ancient *piano*, in which coins and medals of the first two centuries, and inscriptions of great value have been recently discovered ; and of these a full account will be immediately published by the Cavaliere di Rossi. Some of the

inscriptions may still be seen in one of the chambers near the bottom of the staircase; they are both Latin and Greek; sometimes both languages are mixed; and in one or two instances Latin words are written in Greek characters: as, for instance,—

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΝ ΕΤ ΛΕΟΝΤΙΑ
 ΚΕΙΡΙΚΕ ΦΙΛΙΑ Ε ΒΕΝΕΜΕΡΗΝ
 ΤΙ ΜΗΝΟΘΗΚΗ ΙΗΘΥΣ
 Ο ΚΥΡΙΟΝ ΤΕΚΝΟΝ ΕΜ . . .

“Demetrius and Leontia, to their well-deserving daughter Syrica. Remember, O Lord Jesus, our child.”

Many of these monuments are of the deepest importance, both in an antiquarian and religious point of view; in archæology, as showing the practice of private Christians in the first ages to make these subterranean chambers at their own expense and for their own use; *e.g.*

M. AURELIUS RESTUTUS FECIT YPOGEU
 SIBI ET SUIS FIDENTIBUS IN DOMINO.

“M. Aurelius Restutus made this subterranean for himself, and those of his family who believe in the Lord.”

where, both the triple names and the limitation introduced at the end (which shows that many of his family were still Pagan), are unquestionable proofs of very high antiquity; in the history of religious doctrine, as establishing the antiquity both of prayers for the dead and of invocation of saints. The most remarkable paintings in this cemetery are those of Orpheus with his lyre, surrounded by the birds and beasts whom his

music has charmed; the Ascent of Elias into Heaven, in a chariot drawn by four horses (in the same chapel), and the meaning of which shall be explained presently; our B. Lady, seated on a throne with the Holy Infant in her arms, and on either side two of the wise men bringing their gifts: two *arcosolia* opposite one another in one of the galleries, and in both of which the same three subjects are represented, viz., the Good Shepherd, the Raising of Lazarus, and the Striking of the Rock; another *arcosolium*, with our Lord seated in the midst of His Apostles; a highly-ornamented chapel of a very curious form, in one of whose apses the same scene is represented, with the peculiarity that two of the Apostles are seated, viz., S. Peter and S. Paul,* whilst all the rest stand; and in the opposite apse,—for the whole chapel consists of little else than two apses, with a narrow gallery between them,—a very fine figure of a Good Shepherd, having sheep on either side of him, and several other figures which it is not easy to distinguish. Another chapel in the same neighbourhood is hexagonal, and the ceiling is divided into several compartments by wreaths of roses, each compartment containing one of the usual subjects, Noe and his Ark, the Three Children in the fiery furnace, our Lord multiplying the loaves and fishes, and others, executed,

* These paintings are so injured by time, that the identity of these figures can scarcely now be recognised; they were copied, however, by Bosio, and represent the received types of those Apostles too exactly to leave any room for doubt. The identity is the more unquestionable, because Bosio himself, misinterpreting the painting to be of Our Lord sitting in the Temple in the midst of the Doctors, did not observe or understand it.

however, on a much larger scale than most of the paintings in the Catacombs.

In the Catacomb of San Ponziano, situated on the side of the hill between the Porta Portese and the Porta San Pancrazio, is the only perfect specimen still extant of a primitive subterranean baptistery. A small stream of water runs through this cemetery, and at this one place the channel has been deepened so as to form a kind of reservoir, in which a certain quantity of water is retained. We descend into it by a flight of steps, and the depth of water it contains varies with the height of the Tiber. When that river is swollen so as to block up the exit by which this stream usually empties itself, the waters are sometimes so dammed back as to inundate the adjacent galleries of the Catacombs; at other times there are not above three or four feet of water. At the back of the font, so to call it, and springing out of the water, is painted a beautiful Latin Cross, from whose sides leaves and flowers are budding forth, and on the two arms rest two candlesticks, with the letters Alpha and Omega suspended by a little chain below them. This may probably have been intended to denote that Christ had given efficacy to the waters of baptism only by the cross planted therein. On the front of the arch over the font is the Baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan by St. John, whilst S. Abdon, S. Sennen, S. Miles, and other saints of the Oriental Church occupy the sides. These paintings are all of late date, perhaps of the seventh or eighth century; but there is no reason to doubt but that the baptistery had been so used from the earliest times. We have distinct evidence in the Acts of the Martyrs that that sacrament was not unfrequently admi-

nistered in the cemeteries ; and indeed there were probably several other such baptisteries in other cemeteries, for it would have been impossible that all persons should have been brought to the same. In the immediate neighbourhood of this baptistery are other paintings ; but, excepting a head of our Saviour, on the Byzantine type, very like that which has been described as being near the tomb of S. Cecilia, none of them require any special notice.

On the other side of Rome, the road that goes out of the Porta Salara is peculiarly rich in Catacombs. That of S. Hermes, under a villa belonging to the Jesuits on the left-hand side of the road, is remarkable for the largest subterranean church that has yet been found ; also for a mosaic vaulting in the roof of one of the chapels, of coarse workmanship, but representing Daniel in the lions' den and the raising of Lazarus. The whole of this cemetery, however, is in a ruinous condition, and requires great care and caution in visiting it. That of Sta. Priscilla, in a vineyard on the opposite side of the road, is far more extensive, and may be safely visited. There are several stories in it, and one of its galleries is the longest and straightest I ever met with in the Catacombs ; some of the tombs are ornamented with portraits of the deceased, executed with peculiar force and expression ; at the mouths of others may be seen lamps or other objects that have never been disturbed ; and in a third Catacomb, still further on in the same road, the arrangement of the chapels should be noticed, that they are not merely double, one over against the other on opposite sides of the gallery, as at S. Agnes and S. Callisto, but that there is often a third, placed on one side just

between them, where the catechumens and others might kneel during such parts of the Liturgy and other offices of the Church as they were privileged to enjoy.

The paintings of another Catacomb, situated near the church of San Pietro and Marcellino beyond the walls, and known by the names of those saints, exhibit two or three representations of the joys of heaven under the figure of a feast, at which both men and women are assembled, and Love and Peace are standing as the ministers of the entertainment. "IRENE, DA MIHI CALDA;" "AGAPE MISCE MIHI VINUM;" "Irene, give me hot water;" "Agape, mix me some wine;" which are here written over the heads of the servants in attendance, carry us back to the language of classical times and authors upon such subjects; the personification of Christian gifts and graces in the names of the servants alone suggesting the mystical and spiritual interpretation that was intended. In another chapel are paintings of a later date, representing our Blessed Lord between S. Peter and S. Paul, and below them four of the principal saints buried in the cemetery, Petrus, Gorgonius, Marcellinus, and Tiburtius, standing two on either side of a little hill, whence issue four streams, probably "the river of water of life" (Apoc. xxii. 1), which St. John saw in the heavenly Jerusalem, divided into four streams to correspond to the four rivers that went out from the earthly Paradise of our first parents; for S. John tells us that this river proceeded from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and the little hill I have spoken of is here made the throne of God and of the Lamb, for on the top of it stands a lamb with a *nimbus* round

his head and the monogram behind him, to denote his Divinity, that he is no other than "the Lamb of God."

I say nothing of the Catacombs which are entered from the church of San Pancrazio, because they have no special characteristic to make them worthy of a visit, unless the methodical arrangement of the graves in some portions of the galleries be thought such; nor of those on either side of the road near the Basilica of S. Lorenzo beyond the walls, where, however, there are a few chapels highly ornamented, and the galleries, instead of crossing one another at right angles, often diverge like so many *radii* from a common centre; nor of that of S. Helen, under the Villa del Grande on the same road, which differs only from the rest in the grandeur of its dimensions, and its mosaic pavement, wrought in various patterns; nor of the small Catacomb of the Gnostic heretics on the Via Appia, with their mixture of Christian and Mithraic symbols, their Pluto and Proserpine (*Dis Pater* and *Abracura*), their Mercury and Divine Fates, their *Angelus Bonus* and Mars, and Venus, and Soldier offering sacrifice to a star, &c. &c., because these are more suited to the study of the learned than the general inspection of the multitude; and such persons may procure the treatise of P. Garucci, a Neapolitan Jesuit, on the subject, in which accurate copies are given, both of the paintings and inscriptions. Nor, again, have I thought it necessary to give any account of the little cemetery of San Zotico, with its paintings of the Evangelists and others, which is situated in a farm of the Campagna called Capreoli, somewhere below the heights of Frascati and Monte Porzio.

All these, with some five or six others besides, I visited myself several years ago, and have renewed my acquaintance with most of them recently, and of course any one who wishes really to master the subject in all its details, will make a point of visiting them also; I only mention them here for the sake of impressing upon the general reader the great extent of the matter which is comprised under this oft-repeated word, the Roman Catacombs, and furnishing him with a clue by which he may be assisted in his researches, if he feel disposed to prosecute them beyond the very limited range of ordinary sight-seers.

For the present, then, let us here end our subterranean rambles, and prosecute the further study of our subject by the light of day.

It is a common subject of regret to all who visit the Catacombs, that they should have been so completely stripped of all the objects of interest which they once contained; that the rings, seals, lamps, *ampullæ*, cups of ornamented glass, instruments of martyrdom, and, above all, the inscriptions, should not have been left, as far as possible, in their original places, where they would have been so much more appreciated than when placed amongst a multitude of heterogeneous objects in a Museum. The Catacombs, however, in this respect have only shared the lot of most other monuments of antiquity, whether Pagan or Christian; and there is much to be said in favour of these miscellaneous collections as well as against them. A more legitimate subject of complaint, perhaps, is to be found in the imperfection of the museums themselves. Had everything which has been found in the Catacombs since their discovery in the sixteenth century been carefully brought

together into one place, and properly arranged, they would have formed, as it were, an inexhaustable library for the student of Christian antiquity. As it is, these precious objects must be sought, not only in various public museums, but also in several private collections; and very many will be sought for in vain.

The most important public collections are those at the Vatican and Lateran Palaces; in the museum of the Roman College, also, there is a small chamber devoted to the same purpose; and in the Propaganda, there are several objects of high interest; and a visit to the first two, at least, of these, is a necessary complement to a visit to the Catacombs.

The most numerous class of objects in these museums are the small *terra-cotta* lamps, found in such abundance at the graves of the Catacombs. They are generally plain, and of an ordinary form; many, however, are ornamented with some emblem or device, such as the fish, the dove, the palm-branch, the monogram, the Good Shepherd, and some others; and sometimes the whole lamp is moulded in the form of a fish or a dove, or the handle at least presents some Christian symbol. Lamps of the same form, made in bronze and suspended from chains of the same material, are generally of a somewhat later date, very few of these having been found in the Catacombs themselves. Another class of objects in these museums, small, and (in some instances) of doubtful authenticity, is of so-called instruments of martyrdom. Some appear to be genuine; at least they correspond with sufficient exactness to the idea which we derive from the descriptions of the early Christian writers,—of the *ungulæ*, for example, or

iron claws with which the flesh of the martyrs was often so cruelly torn ; and of the *plumbatæ*, or leaded scourges, by which others were beaten to death. Others, however, look far more like domestic utensils, and seem to be of Etruscan workmanship ; and these were probably never taken from the Catacombs at all.

In fact, in order to form a really just estimate of any object in a museum, it is necessary to know whence it was taken, as well as the circumstances under which it was found ; and this is just what it is often most difficult to ascertain. Each article has, as it were, its own history, and these it is impossible to enter upon in a volume like the present. We can only speak generally, and direct attention to the principal objects of interest, amongst which the first place must certainly be awarded to those numerous broken chalices and other cups of glass which are often found in the Catacombs, and many of which are beautifully enamelled in gold, representing ordinarily some of those sacred subjects that are seen in the paintings and in sculpture. More than twenty of these in the Vatican collection give us the heads or full figures of the two great Apostles, SS. Peter and Paul, joint founders of the Roman Church. Sometimes they stand side by side, without any figure or emblem, but plainly identified by their names ; sometimes Christ stands above or between them, placing a crown on each of their heads, or one crown hangs suspended between both : or they are separated by our Blessed Lady, who prays with outstretched arms, whilst they seem to be placed on either side for much the same reason as Aaron and Hur stood on either side of Moses as he sat upon the mountain whilst the children

of Israel fought against Amalec,* to stay up his hands that he might not weary in prayer; or some other saint is with them, as S. Agnes; or one of the Apostles stands alone, as where Peter is striking the rock. On other of these glasses, our Lord is represented changing water into wine, or multiplying the loaves and fishes, or raising Lazarus from the dead, or performing some other of those miracles which have recurred so frequently before, and which so aptly typify the Christian sacraments. Not unfrequently there is a legend round the border, either of some name, or of some pious aspiration, or some social greeting. These last, which are by no means uncommon, clearly show that not all of these cups were eucharistic chalices, but that many of them were used in convivial entertainments, whether of the kind called *agapæ* or any other. It is certain, however, that glass chalices were really used, though only for a short time, in the ancient Church; and the representations of the Good Shepherd, of which Tertullian speaks, were probably executed in this very way.

It has been already mentioned that these glasses are found in the Catacombs, attached to the outside of the graves, in the mortar, in the same way as the lamps and *ampullæ*, and were probably placed there only as a means of identifying particular graves. The same object was attained in other instances by fastening rings, seals, or any other indifferent objects, in the same place; and specimens of these, too, may be found in most museums. The *ampullæ*, on the contrary, having been, in a manner, consecrated by the blood of martyrs, are preserved in the

* Exod. xvii. 12.

Relic Office, where a large collection of them, as well as of some other treasures taken from the Catacombs, may be seen on the Thursday in Passion week, that being the day on which the *station* is at the adjoining church of S. Apollinare.

This meagre account of the contents of the Christian Museum of the Vatican, so far as they belong to our subject, will serve at least to furnish some general ideas by which the visitor may be guided in his appreciation of what he sees both in this and other similar collections; but if it is desired to study the subject more perfectly, the work of Filippo Buonarruoti* should be consulted, and the museums visited, in the company of some guide well versed in Christian antiquities. It is obvious, indeed, that such a companion would be of incalculable assistance in visiting all the museums, as well as the cemeteries themselves; but it is more essential at the Vatican than elsewhere; because objects belonging to totally different epochs are there not unfrequently mixed in one and the same cabinet. In the Museum of Christian Art at the Lateran Palace, on the other hand, we may walk more boldly without a guide, or with only such guidance as the following observations will supply.

The interest of this museum consists in the collection of Christian sarcophagi which it contains, taken from the various basilicas and other churches that were built by the first Christian emperors. Strictly speaking, therefore, perhaps they scarcely come within the limits of our subject, as belonging for the most part to an epoch

* *Osservazioni sopra alcuni Frammenti di Vasi antichi di Vetro, &c.* Firenze, 1716.

somewhat later than the use of the Catacombs for general purposes of burial. Nevertheless, they are so closely connected with it, both by the identity of purpose for which the sarcophagi were made, and still more by the identity of subjects represented upon them, that our readers will naturally look for some account of them at our hands. Moreover, some few of the sarcophagi have actually been found within the Catacombs themselves; and in all, the subjects carved upon them are, as nearly as possible, the same as those painted upon the walls of the subterranean chapels. There are some additions, however, very worthy of note, as marking an extension of the range of subjects upon which Christian art ventured to exercise itself in the fourth and fifth centuries, for to this date must most of these monuments be assigned. The Holy Trinity, for example, is nowhere represented, as far as I know, in the paintings of the Catacombs; whereas, in the very first of these sarcophagi which we examine, It forms one of its most conspicuous objects; and It is to be seen also in several others of the same collection. Still, on the whole, it may fairly be said that the sculptures of these tombs merely repeat and continue the paintings of the Catacombs, so that he who is thoroughly familiar with the one will have but little difficulty in interpreting the other.

Let us proceed to examine the first, that which stands at the end of the long gallery, before we ascend the steps. It is, perhaps, the most valuable of all; so that a minute explanation of this will supersede the necessity of explaining several others, which in fact only exhibit inferior specimens of the same thing. It was found in

the basilica of S. Paul, on the Ostian Way, precisely over the Apostle's tomb, and it became necessary to remove it, that they might provide a proper foundation for those magnificent pillars of oriental alabaster which support the modern Baldacchino. It must have been placed there at the time of the rebuilding of that basilica by Theodosius, at the beginning of the fifth century, and was never really completed. Of the busts which occupy the centre compartment of the upper division, and which were of course intended to be portraits of the man and his wife for whose burial the sarcophagus was provided, nothing but the mere outline has been chiselled; and other heads behind and between the principal figures are in the same unfinished condition. The main subjects, however, are probably as highly wrought as they were ever intended to be; and, whatever may be thought of the artistic merits of their execution, they certainly present a very interesting series of Scripture histories for the meditation of the Christian student. First, we have the Creation of Man; God the Son, "by Whom all things were made," has just created Eve out of the side of Adam, who lies asleep at his feet; and He presents her to God the Father, seated on his throne, who "blesses" her, whilst the Third Person of the ever adorable Trinity stands behind, with His hand resting upon the throne. But immediately after the Creation followed sin, and with the fall came also the promise of a Redeemer. This, therefore, forms the subject of the next group. God the Son now appears, no longer according to His Divine Nature, in which He "was with God from the beginning;" but according to the mystery of His Incarnation; a

young man, the same as is again repeated working various miracles. First he stands between Adam and Eve, awarding to each some portion of the punishment that was due to them for their sin, viz., the punishment of labour; to Adam He gives a wheatsheaf, in token that he was to till the ground, and to Eve a lamb, the spinning of whose wool was hereafter to be the employment of her daughters. The unfinished busts already spoken of separate these Old Testament histories from those which follow, taken from the New, viz., the changing of water into wine, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the resurrection of Lazarus, in which last scene is added the figure of one of his sisters kneeling at our Lord's feet, as though petitioning for the miracle that was wrought. The subjects of the lower division begin with the Adoration of our Blessed Lord by the three Magi, bearing their gifts in their hands; and it is observable that the chair or throne on which our Lady sits seems to be the same as that in which the Eternal Father is represented above, excepting that it is without any covering, and that the Holy Spirit stands behind it in the same attitude as He stands above. This of course must be intended to denote that "that which was born of her was of the Holy Ghost," and that the child, sitting on her knees, was He to whom the kings of Arabia and Saba should bring gifts. Next follows a miracle of our Lord, giving sight to the blind; that miracle which typifies so aptly our natural condition, and the illumination which we receive by the gift of faith in baptism. In the centre, immediately under the busts, is Daniel between the lions, with the Holy Spirit on one side, and on

the other Habacuc brought by the hair of his head, and carrying the bread which he had broken, and which was now to serve for the prophet's sustenance. We can hardly be mistaken in supposing this to be symbolical of the true bread which alone could be the adequate support of Christians amidst the fiery persecutions to which they were exposed.

It will probably attract the attention of our Protestant readers that the scene here represented is one with which they are not familiar, for it is taken from that portion of Scripture which they call apocryphal; nevertheless, an examination of the other monuments in this gallery will supply us with other histories, taken from the same source; the history of Bel and the Dragon, for example, and that of Susanna and the Elders. The former appears in the front of two or three sarcophagi, in the person of Daniel offering a cake of some kind to a dragon before whom an altar has been overthrown; and the latter is represented allegorically in a painting, from the cemetery of S. Pretextatus, of a lamb standing between two wolves or foxes; over the lamb is written *Susanna*, and over the other animals *senioris*, i.e. *seniores*, or elders. The remaining subjects of this sarcophagus are from the life of S. Peter, and have been already sufficiently explained; they consist of three scenes, which are repeated again and again on various other monuments in the gallery; viz., the installation of S. Peter in his office as head of the Church, typified by his receiving the rod of power from Christ, Who had held it whilst working His miracles, and now is without it; his apprehension by the Jews, and his striking the rock. I have not been able to satisfy myself as

to the reason wherefore this second scene in the life of S. Peter (his apprehension by the Jews) should have been selected rather than any other in these monuments; its constant repetition, however, and almost invariably in this order, viz., between the receiving of the rod and the striking of the rock, shows that the early Christians must have attached some special significance to it of which I am ignorant; whether it was as a partial fulfilment of those words of our Lord spoken immediately after giving him the commission to feed His sheep, viz., "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee and lead thee whither thou wouldst not"*—the earnest, or first-fruits, as it were, of His martyrdom;—or whether it was meant to be typical of the whole Church entering into a period of persecutions; or as an example of the more general Christian law, that those who would serve Christ Jesus must suffer persecution; or, lastly, whether it had a more personal signification, and typified Peter's strength, as contrasted with his previous denial, set before us by the cock which stands at his feet. Which of these interpretations, or whether any, be correct, I will not undertake to say. Neither of them seems at all unnatural or inappropriate; but in the absence of any testimony from the writings of the ancient fathers to confirm them, it seems safer to abstain from any positive assertion. For this is a rule which I think should be carefully observed in assigning a spiritual or mystical interpretation to these representations of historical scenes, viz., never to advance anything that is not plainly stated, or at least clearly suggested,

* S. John, xxi. 18.

by some ancient authority; by this means we shall avoid all extravagancies of private interpretation and individual fancy.

As we proceed up the gallery, the more interesting monuments are arranged on our left hand, where they can best be seen; but even in these there is not much that will be new to one who has visited the Catacombs of S. Agnes and S. Calixtus, and the Museum at the Vatican. Representations of the Holy Trinity occur again, with Cain and Abel bringing their respective gifts; the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, and the ram to be substituted for him, are very common, which I do not remember to have seen painted excepting in the Catacomb of Sta. Priscilla; the woman touching the hem of our Lord's garment; His triumphant entry into Jerusalem; and, in one or two specimens at the extreme end of the gallery, different scenes from His Passion. Even here, however, these last are not represented literally, but under a certain veil of secrecy; for instance, it is not our Blessed Lord, but some other, who bears the cross; the crown which is being placed on His head is of flowers rather than of thorns, and corresponds better to the mystical language of the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles,* "The diadem wherewith His mother crowned Him in the day of His espousals," than to the simple truth of the Gospel narrative: "And plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head." The Labarum of Constantine appears in the centre of these monuments, with two birds pecking at the wreath of flowers by which it is encircled, emblems of Christian souls tasting the sweetness of eternal bliss; whilst two soldiers sit

* iii. 2.

beneath it, the one in an attitude of wakeful vigilance, the other asleep; types of other Christian souls, who are still in their state of trial, not having yet entered into their rest.

Of Jonas, Noe and his ark, Daniel, and the three children in the fiery furnace, we need make no special mention; but there is a fragment inserted in the wall, immediately opposite to us as we ascend the last staircase, which deserves notice; a fragment, representing the ascent of Elias into heaven, and the prophet leaving his mantle to Eliseus. This scene is also painted in a chapel of the Catacombs of SS. Nereus and Achilles, and sculptured on some three or four other sarcophagi, one of which may be seen in S. Peter's, under an altar near the sacristy-door, where it contains the relics of Popes Leo II., Leo III., and Leo. IV.; and its meaning is sufficiently explained by a reference to the usages of antiquity, both sacred and profane. We read in the lives of the old Pagan philosophers, that their scholars gloried in adopting the dress as well as the principles of their masters; even Romans themselves did not disdain to exchange the national *toga* for the *palium* of their Grecian instructors. But the mantle that had been worn by any of those teachers themselves became the object of special veneration; it was looked upon as a sort of type or representation of the teacher himself, and he who wore it was considered as heir of his spirit, and his most legitimate successor. What we read in the Old Testament concerning the mantle of Elias, and in ecclesiastical history concerning the cloaks of certain great saints, and especially of the Apostolic founders of churches, and what we see at the present day in the use of the pall, can only

be properly understood by a reference to these facts. When Elias had been commanded by God to anoint Eliseus to be prophet in his stead,* we read that he went and found Eliseus ploughing, and when Elias came up to him, he cast his mantle upon him. And forthwith he left the oxen and ran after Elias, and said, "I will follow thee." And he said, "That which was my part, I have done to thee." He had been told to anoint Eliseus to be prophet in his room, and he now says that he has done this; he has done it by casting his mantle upon him. By-and-by Elias is caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, in the presence of Eliseus; and Eliseus takes up the mantle of Elias that fell from him, and returning to the river Jordan, he strikes the waters with the mantle, and after he has called upon the name of God, the waters were divided hither and thither,† and Eliseus passed over. And the sons of the prophets seeing it said, "The spirit of Elias hath rested upon Eliseus." Thus, it was by the mantle of Elias that Eliseus was first inaugurated prophet, and by the same mantle that he received "his double spirit," according to the promise that had been made him, and was recognized as his legitimate successor. Even so in the Christian Church, the *pallium* or mantle of S. Mark was handed on from one bishop to another as they successively occupied the chair of that Evangelist in Alexandria; and as the old writers tell us, *tunc legitimè sedet*, then a man is considered lawfully to have succeeded, when he has removed this mantle from off the neck of his deceased predecessor and placed it on his own. S. Paul, the first hermit, prayed S. Anthony to bring him the mantle of

* 3 Kings, xix. 16.

† 4 Kings, ii. 12—15.

S. Athanasius, that he might be buried in it; and when he had done so, S. Anthony in like manner took the mantle of S. Paul, and wore it on all great festivals. Traces of the same practice are to be found in the history of the Churches of Constantinople, and, above all, in the Church of Rome. The *pallium* which is worn by the Popes and by those patriarchs and archbishops to whom the Popes may send it, has, from the earliest times, been considered as the special type or symbol of the fulness of authority derived from the Prince of the Apostles. When the newly-elected Pope receives it from the hands of the Archdeacon in the ceremony of his consecration at the shrine of S. Peter, the investiture is accompanied by these words, "Receive the *pallium*, to wit, the fulness of the Apostolic office." When he himself blesses other *pallia*, it is at the same place, and on the day of S. Peter's martyrdom, that it is done; there, also, they rest until they are sent to those whose privilege it is to receive them; so that they are still, as always, said to be sent from the body of S. Peter, *de corpore Sancti Petri*; and those who receive them,—as we read of our own S. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, and of those who were present at his inauguration,—kiss them, and treat them with reverence *in obsequium Petri*, in token of obedience and devotion to S. Peter. But whence did S. Peter himself receive it? Whose successor and representative was he? The kingdom which he established upon earth was none of his making; he cannot claim to be considered as the original founder of that dynasty which yet rules in the Holy See. He only received the keys of the kingdom from Him Who was its true founder; and He it is, therefore, Who, in the paintings and

carvings of early Christian art, is leaving His mantle to Peter as He ascends into heaven; and Peter, deeming himself unworthy of so precious and holy a deposit, does not dare to receive it with uncovered hands, but holds them forth only under the covering of his own mantle. The early Christians then intended to symbolize by this representation that the spirit of Christ had rested upon Peter, and from him it has ever been transmitted to his legitimate successors.*

The statue of S. Hippolytus which faces us at the end of the gallery is spoken of by Winckelmann and other critics as the finest specimen of ancient Christian sculpture in existence, and must probably be considered as a contemporary work, or at least not long posterior to his age, *i.e.*, not much later than the third century. It was discovered in the course of making some excavations at the back of *San Lorenzo fuori le mura*, and must have been placed originally, if not in the Catacombs themselves, in some church built in immediate connection with them. The famous Paschal cycle which is inscribed on one side of his chair, and the list of his works inscribed upon the other, are monuments for the study of the learned, not for the amusement of those to whom alone we profess to be guides. And the paintings in the adjacent chamber are, for the most part, only copies of those whose originals have been already described in their proper places in the cemeteries themselves. The principal exception to this remark is the painting of our Lord and the four Evangelists, which is taken from the cemetery of S. Callixtus. Our Lord is sitting on a throne

* This subject will be found more fully treated in an article by the Author in the *Rambler* of July, 1856.

with two Evangelists on either side of Him. A chest at His feet contains three of the Gospels, whilst the fourth He is giving with His own hands to the Evangelist standing nearest to Him on His left. This is manifestly S. John, as it is easy to recognize from the youth of his beardless face; and the privilege of receiving the Book from Christ Himself may be supposed to have reference to the peculiar character of his Gospel, as dwelling most upon the eternal generation and divinity of Our Lord, which none could know save only by revelation. It is no less certain, also, that the figure which stands at the extreme right must be intended for S. Matthew, since the star over his head refers to that event in the Gospel history which no other Evangelist has recorded. It remains, therefore, to see if we can identify the other two, one of whom occupies the first place of all, being preferred even to the beloved Disciple himself, by standing at our Lord's right hand. This, then, we are disposed to think, must be S. Mark, and that this place is given him as the representative of S. Peter, from whose dictation he is sometimes said to have written his Gospel. This, at least, would sufficiently account for his position of pre-eminence, whereas it does not seem easy to find any reason wherefore S. Luke should be preferred to all the other Evangelists; and it is in the highest degree improbable that the artist, having clearly distinguished S. Matthew and S. John, should have had no purpose in his mind as to distinguishing the others.

To pursue our way further into the interior of this museum would bring us to mediæval frescoes lately removed from the walls of *S. Agnese fuori le*

mura; to specimens of Beato Angelico, Pietro Perugino, and others. Let us retrace our steps, therefore, into the open corridor which we crossed, and which contains a small collection of Christian inscriptions; but these are of sufficient importance to require a more detailed examination by themselves.



CHAPTER VII.

THE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE CATACOMBS.



Y far the most important class of objects belonging to the Catacombs, and now to be seen in the Museums, consists of the stones or marble slabs having inscriptions engraved upon them. These precious monuments of antiquity it is scarcely possible to over-estimate. Unfortunately, however, the collections are very imperfect, having been made only in recent times, when large numbers had been already scattered to distant parts of the world, and a still larger number had perished altogether. Many, and often the most valuable, had been given to learned antiquarians or devout ecclesiastics, who coveted them for their own possession, without reflecting upon the grievous injury which they were thus inflicting upon those who came after them; others, again, were injudiciously placed, even by persons who knew their value and were anxious for their preservation, in the pavements of churches, where—as might have been expected—they have either gradually been effaced by the constant tread of worshippers, or thoughtlessly removed, and so lost sight of altogether, on occasion of some subsequent restoration of that portion of the church.

It is to the Sovereign Pontiffs that we are principally indebted for whatever fragments have been

preserved from the general wreck. As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, Pope Nicholas V. seems to have entertained the idea of collecting all the lapidarian monuments of early Christianity which had at that time been discovered; and both Eugenius IV., his immediate predecessor, and Callixtus III., who succeeded him, forbade under heavy penalties the alienation or destruction of anything belonging to this class of monuments. When Leo X., too, appointed Raphael to superintend the works at the rebuilding of St. Peter's, he gave him a special charge that the *res lapidaria* should not be injured. In later times these injunctions became more earnest and more frequent, in proportion to the increasing number and importance of the inscriptions that were brought to light. Still nothing appears to have been done beyond the constant repetition of these prohibitions, until the reign of Benedict XIV., who appointed the learned Francisco Branchini to collect all the sculptural stones that could be found; and it was he who recommended the long, narrow gallery leading to the Vatican library and museum as a convenient place for their preservation. Even then, political and other difficulties interfered to prevent the execution of the design, so that it was not until the close of the last century that it was really carried out by Gaetano Marini, under the orders of Pope Pius VI.

It is of importance that these facts should be known, because ignorance of them has led some writers to speak of the Lapidarian Gallery (as it is called) as though it were a selection of the most ancient, curious, and valuable inscriptions that have ever been found in the Catacombs; and they have then gone on to argue that this selection,

“made under Papal superintendence and arranged by the hands of modern Romanists,” contains “a distinction, virtually drawn by themselves, between what belongs to a pure age and what to the times of innovation,”* so that, if there be any Catholic doctrine or practice of which no trace can here be found, it may at once be rejected as a modern corruption. Of the irrelevancy of this argument we may have something to say hereafter; at present let the fact be carefully borne in mind that the Lapidarian Gallery contains no *selection* of monuments whatever, but is merely a gathering together of all that had not otherwise been disposed of before the time of Benedict XIV.

The entire collection, as it exists at present, contains about twelve or thirteen hundred monuments, which are inserted into the wall without any attempt at classification beyond that of separating those which contain the names of the consuls from those which are without this chronological note. Besides these, a few hundreds may be seen in the museums of the Capitol, the Lateran, and of the Roman College; in the cloisters of S. Paul, S. Gregory, and S. Lawrence beyond the walls; as also in the porticos of S. Mark, Sta. Maria in Trastevere, and some other churches. Altogether, the whole number which are thus preserved scarcely exceed two thousand,—not a fifth part of what have actually been discovered,—yet still a number sufficiently large, and containing examples of sufficient importance, to enable us to appreciate their value, and to increase our regret that so many more should have been dispersed and lost.

The greater portion of these epitaphs were cut in the stone or marble slabs with which the tombs were

* We quote from Dr. Maitland.

closed ; others were rudely traced with the sharp end of the trowel in the mortar with which those slabs were secured ; and in some few the letters are not cut at all, but only written on the surface with red paint, or, more rarely, with charcoal. Most of them are Latin, and written in Latin letters ; some also are Greek, and written according to the Greek alphabet ; whilst not a few display a singular confusion both of the languages and alphabets. This circumstance is easily accounted for, when we remember that Rome was at that time the metropolis of the world ; that a large proportion of the Roman slaves was brought from Asia Minor and other parts of Greece ; and that whereas it is always comparatively easy to acquire the habit of conversing in the language of those around us, it requires both ability and application to learn to *write* a foreign language correctly, more especially if it be encumbered with the additional difficulty of a strange alphabet.

The precise date of each particular inscription is obviously a point of considerable importance ; and it is no less obvious that it is impossible to enter upon it here. It can only be said of the inscriptions of the Catacombs in general, that their chronology ranges from the latter end of the first to the early part of the fifth century of our era, the Catacombs having continued during that period to be the common Christian burial-ground of Rome. Of course the *most* certain—some might be disposed to say the *only* sure—means of ascertaining the date of any particular inscription, are the names of the consuls ; but these are rarely found antecedently to the conversion of the empire. Other indications, less secure, but varying in value from mere conjecture to the highest

degree of probability, or even moral certainty, are such as these: the place in which the stone was found, whether in a higher or lower *piano* of the cemetery, near the entrance or deep in the interior, the date of any coins which may have been found attached to that or to adjacent tombs; and generally, any peculiarity whatever, either in the form of speech or in the character of the writing. These, however, are particulars which can only be safely trusted when they are the result of very careful examination; nor can their logical value be otherwise shown than by an extensive induction of examples, altogether inconsistent with the limits of such a volume as the present.

For the same reason we shall pass over many details of philological interest, which a careful study of these inscriptions could not fail to afford; such as happy illustrations of the decay of the Latin tongue, and remarkable approximations to the modern Italian, and even some details of high antiquarian value, but which are not likely to command the general interest of our readers. We propose to confine our attention to two things,—first, the principal points of resemblance or of contrast between the Christian inscriptions and the corresponding monuments of Paganism; and secondly, any traces we may be able to detect of the faith or temper of mind of those by whom, or for whom, these Christian inscriptions were made. To the latter of these tasks we are irresistibly attracted by its own intrinsic interest, and to the former we seem, as it were, to be directly invited every time we visit any of the lapidarian collections within the Eternal City; for, in almost every instance, the Christian and the Pagan monuments stand in juxtaposition the one to the other;

and in the principal collection of all, that is, the Vatican, they stand facing each other on opposite sides of the same gallery, as if for the express purpose of challenging comparison.

The first thing which strikes us, in studying this mass of monumental inscriptions, is the invocation, or, to speak more correctly, the dedication, to the *Dī Manes*, the *ἑοὶ καταχθονιοὶ*, which is universally prefixed to heathen epitaphs, but is of course absent from those of the Christians; a difference which at once proclaims a different religious belief.* This difference is equally proclaimed by the formula *in pace*, which stands at the end of the Christian inscriptions almost as universally as *Dīs Manibus* stands at the beginning of the heathen ones; and in conjunction with this should be mentioned also the different *words* by which the acts of *death* and of *burial* are expressed in the two classes of monuments. A heathen *defunctus est, reddidit naturæ debitum, abreptus est*; a Christian *dormit, quiescit*. A heathen is *situs, conditus, positus, compositus*, in his sarcophagus or grave; a Christian is *depositus*. The precise force of these distinctions will be more properly explained in another place; I mention them now, because they lie on the very surface of our subject, forcing themselves upon our notice

* D. M., or Θ. Κ., has been found on some *few* Christian inscriptions, and there have been authors who would fain interpret them as being intended for *Deo Magno* and *Θεῷ Κριστῷ*; this, however, is manifestly inadmissible. They are best explained by supposing them to have been thoughtlessly used by persons who, seeing them universally prefixed to heathen tombstones, did not stop to consider their meaning. They are not found on any Christian inscription after the beginning of the fourth century.

the moment we have read some half-dozen inscriptions of either class.

The next point, probably, which would attract the attention of the careful student is the very subdued and moderate expressions of grief to which the Christian survivor ventures to give utterance, as compared with the violent outbursts of passion in which the heathen not unfrequently indulged. Among the latter, a bereaved parent or widower pours forth most bitter reproaches, or even raves with uplifted hands against the Gods who have robbed them of the cherished object of their love; among the former, I do not remember ever to have met with a stronger expression of sorrow than is implied in the single word *dolens*; and even this is comparatively rare, and in a very few instances (of parents burying their children) *immerentes*; whilst in others resignation to the will of God is distinctly, though briefly and very touchingly, expressed, *e. g.*:—

ADEODATE DIGNAE ET MERITÆ VIRGINI; ET QVIESCI HIC IN PACE, JVBENTE XPO EJVS.*

“To Adeodata, a worthy and well-deserving virgin; and she rests here in peace, *her Christ commanding her.*”

Another distinction between the two classes of inscriptions, less obvious perhaps, but still more worthy of notice, is to be found in what I may venture to call the *total* absence from Christian epitaphs of all those titles of rank and dignity with which Pagan monuments are so commonly overloaded. Excepting the titles which denote

* In the Lateran Museum.

the various degrees of the Christian hierarchy, and of which I shall have occasion to speak presently, scarcely any can be seen; only a very few belonging to military rank, and those, for the most part, of a date subsequent to the conversion of the empire. Some perhaps may be disposed to account for this remarkable fact by an appeal to those words of the Apostle,* “Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, hath God chosen;” or, in other words, the Christian epitaphs of the first four centuries contain no pompous enumeration of worldly ranks and dignities, because no such rank and dignity had really belonged to those whose deaths are commemorated. But this would be to speak too hastily and too universally; the Apostle does not tell us that *not one* of the mighty or the noble was to be found in the early Church, and ecclesiastical history furnishes us with direct proofs of the contrary, more especially in the city of Rome; yet the inscriptions in the Catacombs tell us of none. Moreover, there is *another* class of titles, the most frequent of *all* in heathen burial-places, yet equally rare in a Christian cemetery, whose absence cannot be thus accounted for; I allude to *servus*, *libertus*, and other words of the same class, which have reference to that great social division of the ancient world into freemen and slaves. One cannot study a dozen monuments of Pagan Rome without reading something of *servus* or *libertus*, “*libertis libertabusque posterisque eorum*;” and I believe the proportion in which they are found is about three out of every four. Yet, in a number of Christian inscriptions in Rome exceeding eleven thousand, and all be-

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

longing to the first six centuries of our era, scarcely six have been found containing any allusion whatever—and even two or three of these are doubtful—to this fundamental division of ancient Roman society.

No one, we think, will be rash enough to maintain, either that this omission is the result of mere accident, or that no individual slave or freedman was ever buried in the Catacombs. Rather, these two cognate facts, the absence from ancient Christian epitaphs of all titles of rank and honour on the one hand, or of disgrace and servitude on the other, can only be adequately explained by an appeal to the religion of those who made them. The children of the primitive Church did not record upon their monuments titles of earthly dignity, because they knew that with the God whom they served “there was no respect of persons;” neither did they care to mention the fact of their bondage, or of their deliverance from bondage, to some earthly master, because they thought only of that higher and more perfect liberty wherewith Christ had set them free; remembering that “he that was called, being a bondman, was yet the freeman of the Lord, and likewise he that was called being free was still the bondman of Christ.”

And this conclusion is still further confirmed by another remarkable fact which should be mentioned; namely, that there are not wanting in the inscriptions from the Catacombs numerous examples of another class of persons, sometimes ranked among slaves, but the mention of whose servitude, such as it was, served rather to record an act of Christian charity than any social degradation,—I allude to the *alumni*, or foundlings, as they may

be called. The laws of Pagan Rome assigned these victims of their parents' crimes or poverty to be the absolute property of any one who would take charge of them. As nothing, however, but compassion could move a man to do this, children thus acquired were not called *servi*, as though they were slaves who had been bought with money, nor *vernæ*, as though they had been the children of slaves and born in the house, but *alumni*, a name simply implying that they had been brought up (*ab alendo*) by their owners. Now it is a very singular fact, that there are actually more instances of *alumni* among the sepulchral inscriptions of Christians than among the infinitely more numerous sepulchral inscriptions of Pagans; showing clearly that this was an act of charity to which the early Christians were much addicted; and the *alumni*, when their foster-parents died, very properly and naturally recorded upon their tombs this act of charity, to which they were themselves so deeply indebted.

It need hardly be mentioned that brevity and simplicity are the especial characteristics of epitaphs in the Catacombs. Very commonly the name of the deceased stands quite alone, or only with the addition of the Christian formula, "in peace," or "in God;" or, if anything be added more personally descriptive of the individual, it is no extravagant panegyric of virtues which never existed, such as too frequently deface the monuments of modern days, but a short and simple memorial, dictated by a spirit of love, and breathing the language of faith and hope. "Well-deserving," "faithful," "servants of God;" these are the ordinary titles bestowed indifferently upon all ranks and ages of the Christian dead;

or occasionally something more distinctive, such as "*amicus omnium, amator pauperum*," &c.—"Friend of all, lover of the poor:" of husbands and wives, it is specified that they were not unmindful of the numerous apostolic exhortations, but had lived together in uninterrupted harmony and peace,—"*semper concordēs*," "*sine lesione animi*," "*sine ullā querelā*;" women, both married and unmarried, are commended for their chastity and modesty, and children for their amiability and innocence, sometimes in plain and simple language, at other times under beautiful figures and illustrations: "*Anima dulcis et innocens, parvulus innocens; Agnellus Dei; Agnella innocens; palumba sine felle; palumbulus sine felle*," and the like—"Sweet and innocent soul; little lamb of God; an innocent lamb; a dove without gall," &c.

Did not matters of graver moment await us, we would gladly prolong our investigation of these relics of the early Church, under that aspect in which alone we have hitherto considered them; viz., in their general characteristic features, as distinguished from the similar relics of heathenism; and by so doing we should glean much interesting information. Those who know—and who does not?—how fascinating it is to spell out the monumental legends of an ordinary English churchyard, may imagine what it is to spend hours upon hours, or even days upon days and months upon months, in spelling out the legends of the great churchyard of primitive Roman Christianity.

For these speak no merely conventional language, as of public monuments, but rather are written as their authors might have written in

their private diaries or in letters to their most intimate friends. Here, a sorrowing mother records the death of her virgin daughter on the thirteenth anniversary of her birth; there a young widower laments that his many travels had prevented his enjoying the society of his wife, excepting for six months of the two years during which they had been married; or another, that his wife had lived with him for fifteen years (*sine lesione animi*) without ever giving offence, and that she bore him seven sons, four of whom *secum habet ad Dominum*—are now with her in the presence of God: here lies an infant of two years old, who died *inter manus parentorum*—in his parents' arms; there a young man, who lived twenty years and seven months, and always lived most innocently with his parents; and so on, through an endless variety of domestic or personal details, each indeed in itself peculiar to the individual to whom it originally referred, yet, when taken all together, furnishing no mean or obscure tokens of the spirit and temper which pervaded the whole body to which those individuals belonged.

It is time, however, that we should now direct our inquiries into another channel, and see whether we cannot gather from the same monuments some traces of the means, whether outward or inward, by which this temper was produced and fostered; or, in other words, whether we cannot find some traces, either of the dogmatic teaching or the sacramental rites of the early Church.

But first let us pause for a moment to examine what amount of proof, and upon what class of subjects, we have a right to look for in monuments of this kind. It has been already noticed that some writers have attempted to draw inferences

hostile to certain articles of the faith from the supposed silence of early Christian epitaphs about them. But is it usual, then, that every man who is buried should have a full profession of his faith engraved upon his tombstone? Do sepulchral monuments ordinarily contain a distinct examination of all the theological dogmas of the age to which they belong? or is a churchyard the place to which we naturally turn when we seek materials for a treatise on Christian doctrine or on ecclesiastical discipline?

On the other hand, we are far from denying but that, when there is an opportunity of comparing together a considerable number of monuments, all belonging to the same age, or place, or class, we may reasonably expect to gather from such comparison many important details concerning the principal features, whether moral, social, or religious, by which that class, place, or age was characterized. It is precisely in this way that we have been endeavouring to draw some conclusions, and now propose to draw others, from the inscriptions of the Catacombs. We only protest against building any argument upon the *silence*, real or supposed, of those inscriptions. In all that they say, let their testimony be received, and with that reverence which is justly its due; but let no man pretend that we are bound to reject as of later date whatever they cannot be proved to contain.

The only matter on which, as it seems to me, we have a right to expect anything like copious and positive information from the sepulchral monuments of a people, is their belief concerning the condition and prospects of those to whom the monuments were erected, and the relations (if

any) which still exist between them and their survivors. And certainly, upon both these points the inscriptions from the Catacombs are, as we shall presently see, abundantly explicit. Upon other matters affecting the Christian community, whether in its sacramental rites, its internal constitution, or its dogmatic teaching, nothing precise and definite can reasonably be looked for. It will be much if they shall be found to contain some incidental hint or slight allusion, which, in the hands of learned commentators, may happily confirm or illustrate knowledge previously received from other independent sources. And here, also, the inscriptions with which we are at present concerned are far from being deficient.

Let me take as an example,—the only one to which, in my present limits, I could hope to do justice,—the various classes or orders of which the whole Church is constituted. First, there is the great general division into clergy and laity; and then each of these may be subdivided within itself. Now, with regard to the various orders of clergy, it is scarcely too much to say that, even if all the writings of the Fathers had altogether perished, we might almost reconstruct the whole fabric of the ecclesiastical polity from the scattered notices contained in these sepulchral inscriptions. *Bishop, priest, deacon, sub-deacon, acolyte, exorcist, and lector*, each and all of these have their several memorials amid the tombstones of subterranean Rome. How little did Calvin dream, when he asked with such scornful confidence, “Where, in the monuments of Christian antiquity, do we ever read or hear of your exorcists?” that he might even then himself have visited their graves and read their epitaphs in the

most ancient cemeteries of the Roman Church; as, for instance, in the cemetery of San Callisto, where, in the floor of one of the chapels, the inscription still remains, "PAULUS EXORCISTA DEPOSITUS MARTYRIES,"—"Paul, the exorcist, buried at (or near) the martyrs."

And besides those several grades of the clergy which have been enumerated, and which are still retained amongst us, we find notices of *other* ranks or offices, which arose from the peculiar circumstances of the times, and have therefore since either altogether ceased, or at least suffered considerable modifications; such as *fossores* and *notarii*, those who dug the graves and buried the dead, and those who compiled the Acts of the Martyrs and other ecclesiastical records.

From clerics we turn naturally to the thought of consecrated members of the other sex, virgins and widows; and about these, too, the Catacombs are not silent. Thus, we read of a *virgo devota*, *ancilla Dei*, *virgo votis deposita*; and, still more distinctly, of a *Matrona vidua Dei*, a *vidua quæ Ecclesiam nihil gravavit*; and again of another widow, *unibyra* (for *univira*), *i. e.*, the wife of one husband, who *sat*—evidently a legal or technical term, denoting the existence of a special *class* of widows,—“who sat a widow for sixty years, *et Ecclesiam nunquam gravavit* :” *i. e.*, although she belonged to the number of those from whom S. Paul directed that the widows should be chosen,* yet she did not therefore avail herself of her privilege of being maintained by the Church, but chose rather to follow the example of the Apostle in not being chargeable to any: “She never burdened the Church,” says her daughter in the epitaph,

* 1 Tim. v. 9.

using the precise word which S. Paul had used, both about himself and about this very subject: "If any of the faithful have widows, let him minister to them, and *let not the Church be charged,*"—" *Et non gravetur Ecclesia.*"

Nor are these the only members of the household of faith, of whom we learn from Scripture or from ecclesiastical tradition, that they were distinguished from the great mass of the community by certain names and titles, and whom we find thus specially designated in the monuments at present under consideration. Thus, we know that those who had but recently been admitted into the Church by baptism were called neophytes;* that the grace of baptism was also called by the title of *illumination*, and that those who were only being prepared for the reception of that sacrament were called *catechumens*; and all these titles are to be found in the Catacombs: "Here lies Achilla, *newly illuminated*;" "Here rests Andragathus, a Greek, a *catechumen*;" "Here rest two innocent brothers, Constantius, a *neophyte*, and Justus, one of the faithful," &c.

Let this example suffice to illustrate the way in which much valuable information is often incidentally given by these inscriptions upon matters which might have been thought foreign to their immediate end; let us now proceed to that upon which, as we have said, we have a right to look for more direct testimony, viz., the condition of the dead, and the relations between the dead and the living.

We have already seen how the Christian vocabulary, for everything connected with death and burial, differed essentially from that of the hea-

* 1 Tim. iii. 6.

then ; and this difference consisted, of course, in the Christian's hope and faith in a future resurrection. The Catacombs themselves were known only by the name of *cemeteries*, or sleeping-places ; a single chamber in them was a *cubiculum*, which also denoted a bedroom ; each body, as it was laid in its grave, was said to be *depositum* there ; deposited, that is, only for a while, to be reclaimed again in that day when the sea and the earth shall give up their dead ; and finally, it was announced concerning the deceased, that he slept in peace ; *slept*, to be awoke again when the last trumpet shall sound. The precise meaning of those ever-recurring words, "*In pace*," has formed the subject of much learned, and sometimes angry, discussion. Some authors, for instance, would understand it according to the strict ecclesiastical sense of the word in ancient times when applied to the reconciliation of sinners or heretics, *i.e.*, they see in it a clear and certain proof of communion with the Church ; whereas it happens that in the only heretical Catacomb with which we are acquainted in the neighbourhood of Rome the inscription round one of the graves runs thus, *Acuti in pace ; Acuti in pace* ; repeated four or five times. Others, again, have supposed it to contain a secret contrast with the troubles and sufferings of the Christian life during those ages of persecution ; but these have forgotten that the same phrase was in use amongst the Jews before Christianity began, and was continued by Christians after persecution had ceased. A third interpretation, therefore, simply fills up the formula according to modern practice, and understands it always to imply a prayer for the deceased, *Requiescat in pace* ; against which it is to be ob-

served that the phrase, as found in the inscriptions from the Catacombs, is often not elliptical at all, and that the verb which is used is as frequently in the indicative as in the imperative or optative moods. "He sleeps," or "he lies in peace," is, as far as I know, the *only* formula to be found in those Jewish epitaphs in which the words occur at all; and in the Christian, it may, I think, be safely affirmed that the same form is quite as common as those others, "Be in peace," "Mayest thou sleep in peace," and the rest. What solution, then, shall we offer of this much-controverted question? We cannot enter at length into the reasons for our opinion; but we believe that here, as in so many other matters of litigation, the truth will be found to lie in a combination of the various conflicting theories, rather than in the unqualified adoption of any to the exclusion of the others. We are inclined to think that all these opinions are true so far as they are affirmative; all false, so far as they are negative. In some inscriptions, *pax* would seem certainly to denote ecclesiastical communion; as, for instance, where a man is said to have *recessisse in pace, reddidisse in pace Dñi*, and the like; and how should it not be so, when we know from the writings of Tertullian, S. Cyprian, and other of the earliest fathers, how universally *pax* was used in this sense, of Christians yet living? On the other hand, it is no less certain that the word sometimes refers only to the *bodily* rest of death, *dormit in somno pacis*, &c.; and authority for it might be quoted from the book of Ecclesiasticus,* "Corpora eorum in pace sepulta sunt;" and the words of the royal Psalmist, "In pace in idipsum dormiam xliv. 11.

et requiescam ?” But, thirdly, that it was in many instances a prayer for the deceased, that his soul might be in everlasting peace, what candid man will venture to deny, who reads it *totidem verbis* distinctly expressed over and over again, *dormi in pace, in pacem estote, quiesce in pace, vivas in pace*, and more frequently still, perhaps, without any verb at all, *Te in pace*, where the accusative case requires us to supply a verb that may govern it, and where Lupi, Mazochi, and other learned antiquarians seem to me rightly to recognize the beginning of some hymn or other well-known liturgical formula, analogous to our *Requiem æternam*, or our *Suscipiat te Christus*,—a conjecture, I may observe, which receives no little confirmation from an inscription that has been found, “*Gaudentia suscipiatur in pace.*”

All this, however, is sometimes allowed by persons who nevertheless contend that these are not really prayers, that they are not, strictly speaking, an act of religion at all, but mere idle exclamations, unavailing expressions of goodwill, regret, and affection, such as the heathens themselves sometimes indulged in on their epitaphs; and, if these were the only forms of prayer for the dead which the Catacombs exhibited, we should not pretend to urge them as very convincing testimony. But what are the facts of the case? Will it be allowed that the following are fair specimens of prayers for the dead?—

“Remember, O Lord, Thy servants who have gone before us, and who sleep in the sleep of peace;

“Give them a place of refreshment, blessedness of rest, and clearness of light;

“ Vouchsafe to unite them to the company of Thy saints.”

Here we have four or five different forms of speech. Are they prayers for the dead, or are they not? If it be said that they are *not*, then we answer that we have no others; these are themselves the very prayers which we use in our daily Mass, or on the anniversaries of the deceased. If it be allowed that they *are* prayers, then we answer that there is not one of them to which we cannot furnish an exact parallel from the inscriptions of the Roman Catacombs.

“ Remember, O Lord, Thy servants who have gone before us, and who sleep in the sleep of peace.” Thus we pray each day for our departed friends in the canon of the Mass, and thus prayed the early Christians also :—

ΑΥΡ. ΑΙΛΙΑΝΟΣ ΠΑΦΛΑΓΩΝ ΘΕΟΥ
ΔΟΥΛΟΣ ΠΙCΤΟC
ΕΚΟΙΜΗΘΗ ΕΝ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΜΝΗCΘΗ ΑΥΤΟΥ
Ο ΘΕΟC ΕΙC ΤΟΥC ΑΙΩΝΑC.

“ Aurelius Ælianus, of Paphlagonia, a faithful servant of God. He sleeps in peace. Remember him, O God, for ever.”

ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟC* ΕΤ ΛΕΟΝΤΙΑ CΕΙΡΙΚΕ ΦΕΙΛΙΕ
ΒΕΝΕΜΕΡΤΙ ΜΝΗCΘΗC ΙΗCΟΥC ΟΚΥΡΙΟC
ΤΕΚΝΟΝ.

“ Demetrius and Leontia to their well-deserving daughter Syrica. Remember, Lord Jesus, our child.”

* This is the Hellenist, or Alexandrine corruption, for ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟC; so in the epitaph of S. Lucius, Pope, lately discovered in the Catacomb of S. Callixtus, his name is written ΔΟΥΚΙC.

Again, we pray that God would give to the dead "a place of refreshment;" and so some Christian of the first ages of the Church prayed for one who was buried in the Catacomb of SS. Nereus and Achilles, at no great distance from Syrica, the subject of our last inscription. The stone may still be seen in the cemetery, and the legend runs thus:—


VICTORIA REFRIGERER
ISSPIRITVS TVS IN BONO.

"Victoria, may thy spirit be refreshed in good,"
i.e. in God.

Examples of this prayer are very numerous; as, for instance, from the cemetery of S. Pretextatus:

BENEMERENTI SORORI BON .. VIII
KAL NOB.

ΔΕΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΣ ΟΝΝΙΠΟΤΕΣ

ΧΡΙΠΙΤ .. ΤΟΥ . ΡΕΦ . ΙΓΕΡΕ . ΙΝ 

"To my well-deserving sister Bon[osa, who died] on the eighth day before the calends of November. May the Almighty God Christ refresh thy spirit in Christ."

And a third:—

KALEMIRE DEVS REFRIGERET
SPIRITUM TVVM VNA CVM SO
RORIS TVÆ HILARE.

"Kalemira, may God refresh thy spirit, together with that of your sister Hilara."

And a fourth, and a fifth, and even a fiftieth would not be wanting, if any object were to be attained by the mere multiplication of examples.

But we pray, also, that God would give to the departed "clearness of light," that He would not suffer their souls to be left in darkness. Neither would this petition have sounded strange to the ears of those members of the ancient Church who were accustomed to see daily in their cemeteries such inscriptions as the following, which have now been removed from thence and placed in the gallery at the Lateran Museum:—

DOMINE NE QVANDO ADVMBRETVR
SPIRITVS VENERIS DE FILIIS IPSEIVS
QVI SVPERSTITIS SVNT BENEROSVS
PROJECTVS.

"Lord, let not the spirit of [our mother] Venus be at any time in darkness. Of the number of her sons, those who survive, Venerosus and Projectus [set up this monument]."

AETERNA TIBI LUX TIMOTHEA IN P.
QUAE VIXIT ANN. XIII MENS VIII IN
PACE

... OS VII ID. AVG.

"Eternal light be to thee, Timothea, in Christ. She lived thirteen years and nine months [and died] in peace. [She was buried; *deposita*] on the seventh day before the Ides of August."

The last form of prayers for the dead which we quoted from the Missal were prayers for peace and rest, and that God would vouchsafe to admit the departed into the company of the saints; and these are far too numerous in the inscriptions of the Catacombs than that we should detain our readers by quoting examples. The same may be said also of another prayer for the dead which we

still retain in our burial service, and which was perhaps more common than any other in the Catacombs, viz., that the deceased might henceforth “live to God:” *Vivas*, or *Bibas*, *in Deo*, *in Deo Christo*; *Ζησαις*, or *Ζησης ἐν Θεῳ*, *ἐν Θεῳ Κυρίῳ Χριστῳ*. In one case, however, this prayer appears under a somewhat different form:—

ZOSIME VIVAS IN NOMINE ΧΤΙ.

“Zosimus, mayest thou live in the name of Christ.”

And this is worth observing, because it furnishes a kind of intermediate link, as it were, between the inscriptions which have been already quoted, and two very remarkable ones which it yet remains to mention:—

RVTA OMNIBVS SVBDITA ET AFFABILIS
BIBET IN NOMINE PETRI IN PACE ✠

“Ruta, subject and affable to all, shall live in the name of Peter in the peace of Christ.”

VIVAS IN NOMINE LAVRENTII.

“Mayest thou live in the name of Laurence.”

It is not to our present purpose to inquire into the exact force of these words, *Vivas in nomine*, whether as applied to Christ or to His saints; but only to point out how here, also, the Church of the present day does but repeat the language of the Church of the Catacombs, when, at the death-bed of each of her faithful children, she bids the departing soul “go forth from out of this world,” not only “in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, son of the living God, who suffered for

thee, and in the name of the Holy Spirit who was poured forth upon thee," but also "in the names of angels and archangels, in the name of the holy *Apostles* and Evangelists, in the name of the holy *Martyrs* and Confessors," &c.

It appears, then, that it is scarcely possible to name a single phrase which is now used by the Church in any of her offices for the dying or the dead, which had not been anticipated by the Christians of the first four centuries in their funeral inscriptions. Let us now go on to inquire whether these same monuments will bear testimony in favour of another article of our holy religion which is often called in question,—the Invocation of Saints. It is clear that the early Christians prayed for the dead: did they also ask any of the dead to pray for them? The last two inscriptions which were quoted hinted at some connection between the rest and happiness of the deceased and the *nomen* of some apostle or martyr, S. Peter or S. Laurence: there are others, in which the care of the departed soul is still more clearly commended to a favoured servant of God who had preceded in the good fight, and was already entered into her rest:—

DOMINA* BASSILA COMMANDAMVS TIBI
CRESCENTINVS ET MICINA FILIA NOS-
TRA
CRESCEN . . QUE VIXIT MEN. X. ET DES . .

"We, Crescentinus and Micina, commend to thee, S. Basilla, our daughter Crescentina, who lived ten months and days."

* *Dominus* or *Domina* were used in ancient inscriptions where we should now use *sanctus* or *sancta*.

And another inscription, found, like the last, in the Catacomb of S. Basilla, now called the Catacomb of S. Hermes :—

AVRELIVS GEMELLVS QUI BIXIT AN...
ET MESES VIII DIES XVIII MATER
FILIO
CARISSIMO BENEMERENTI FECIT IN
PA...
COMMANDO BASSILA INNOCENTIA GE-
MELLI.

“Aurelius Gemellus, who lived year and eight months, and eighteen days. His mother put this to her dearest, well-deserving son. [He rests] in peace. I commend to thee, O Basilla, the innocence of Gemellus.”

Nor were these invocations confined to Saints or Martyrs of great historical celebrity ; a multitude of private graves are marked by similar inscriptions, begging the prayers of the deceased for the surviving relatives. Prudentius, the first Christian poet, as he is commonly called, introduces into one of his hymns a mother addressing her son, just before his martyrdom, with these words :—

“Vale, ait, dulcissime,
Et cum beatus regna Christi intraveris,
Memento matris, jam patrone ex filio.”

“Farewell, my sweetest son ; and when you shall have entered into the blessedness of Christ’s kingdom, remember your mother, being then my patron, as you are now my son.”

Was Prudentius, in these words, availing himself of a poet’s licence, and transgressing the strict limits of Christian truth ? or was he merely

expressing, in a more poetical form, those thoughts and practices with which all of the household of faith had always been familiar? Let us descend into the Catacombs of SS. Nereus and Achilles, and seek to learn something of the faith and practice of those who buried there. Here lies a fragment of a Latin epitaph: it tells us that the person whom it commemorates died in the month of June, and then it concludes with these words, the only portion of the inscription that is perfect:—

VIBAS IN PACE ET PETE PRO NOBIS.

“Mayest thou live in peace, and pray for us.”

Close by there lies another epitaph, in Greek, to the memory of one Augenda, who was buried on the thirteenth day before the Calends of June, and her surviving friends or relatives have written on her tombstone the very same prayer, only in another language:—

ZHCAIC EN KΩ KAI EPΩTA YΠEP HMΩN.

“Mayest thou live in the Lord, and pray for us.”

Or let us visit the Lapidarian Gallery at the Vatican and the collection of inscriptions in the Lateran, and, since these too belong to the same antiquity, we will repeat our inquiry as to the primitive practice in this matter. The following examples will suffice to establish the unequivocal character of the reply:—

ANATOLIUS FILIO BENEMERENTI FECIT
QVI VIXIT ANNIS VII MENSIS VII DIE
BUS XX. ISPIRITVS TVVS BENE REQUIES
CAT IN DEO. PETAS PRO SORORE TVA.

“Anatolius made this for his well-deserving son,

who lived seven years, seven months, and twenty days. May thy spirit happily rest in God. Pray for thy sister."

AURELIVS AGAPETVS ET AURELIA
FELICISSIMA ALVMNE FELICITATI
DIGNISSIMÆ QVE VICSIT ANIS XXX
ET VI
ET PETE PRO CELSINIANV COJVGEM.


"Aurelius Agapetus and Aurelia Felicissima to their most excellent foster-child Felicitas, who lived thirty-six years; and pray for your husband Celsinianus."

PETE PRO PARENTES TVOS
MATRONATA MATRONA
QVE VIXIT AN. I DI LII.

"Pray for your parents, Matronata Matrona, who lived one year and fifty-two days."

ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟC ΝΗΠΙΟC ΑΚΑΚΟC ΕΝΘΑΔΕ
ΚΕΙΤΕ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΜΝΗCΚΕCΘΕ
ΔΕ ΚΑΙ ΗΜΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΑΙC ΑΓΙΑΙC ΥΜΩΝ
ΠΡΕΥΧΑΙC ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΓΛΥΨΑΤΟC ΚΑΙ
ΓΡΑΨΑΝΤΟC.

"Dionysius, an innocent child, lies here with the saints: and remember us, too, in your holy prayers, both me who engraved and me who wrote [this inscription]."

GENTIANVS FIDELIS IN PACE QVI VIX
IT ANNIS XXI MENSS VIII DIES
XVI ET IN ORATIONIS TVIS
ROGES PRO NOBIS QVIA SCIMVS TE IN 

"Gentianus, one of the faithful, in peace, who lived twenty-one years, eight months, and sixteen

days. And in your prayers pray for us, because we know you [to be] in Christ."

We abstain from citing many other examples, which we have seen and copied, lest we should weary our readers; for surely none can affect to misunderstand the testimony of those already adduced. Only, lest it should be objected that, after all, these may be nothing more than instances of error and extravagance on the part of private and ill-instructed individuals, let us add the testimony of an early Pope, engraved on a monument of the same kind, and publicly set up in a very conspicuous place. In the Basilica of S. Agnes beyond the Walls, may be seen the epitaph composed by Pope Damasus in the fourth century, in honour of that saint, and set up at her tomb by himself. In it he first gives some account of her martyrdom, and then concludes by thus invoking her assistance:—

"*Ut Damasi precibus faveas, precor, inclita martyr.*"

"I pray, O noble martyr, that you will help the prayers of Damasus."

And the same holy Pontiff wrote another epitaph for the tomb of his sister Irene (who died a nun at the age of twenty), ending with these words:—

"*Nostri reminiscere, Virgo,
Ut tua per Dominum præstet mihi facula lumen.*"

"Remember me, O virgin, that by God's help your torch may give me light."

These, I believe, are among the most important particulars on which the sepulchral inscriptions of

the Catacombs throw any great light; or if there be other matters of Christian doctrine, of higher importance in themselves and capable of receiving equal illustration from the same source, the inscriptions which refer to them require more minute and critical examination than would have been consistent with the limits of our present work. Those which have been quoted are plain and simple, speaking clearly for themselves; and it is only necessary to add concerning them, that very many, and especially those of the highest importance, belong to the earliest ages of Christianity. For the proofs of this assertion, as also for other inscriptions bearing testimony to the sacraments of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and other mysteries of the Faith, students must be content to await the publication of my learned friend, the Cavaliere di Rossi, which will contain all the Christian inscriptions of Rome during the first six centuries.

Meanwhile, let the present specimen suffice to satisfy our readers of the great value and interest which attach to these precious relics of Christian antiquity, considered as witnesses to the ancient Faith. We pass by many other points on which their testimony is scarcely less equivocal, because we have been more concerned with their antiquarian than their theological aspect; we could not, however, altogether omit this view of our subject, both for the sake of the Church's children and also of inquirers after the truth. The Roman Catacombs were brought to light in the sixteenth century, amid the din and strife of religious controversy, when the passions of men were too hot to allow them to give a fair hearing to a voice issuing from the graves of centuries long gone by.

At a moment when even the most time-honoured monuments of antiquity were rudely called in question, and required to produce their credentials afresh, as though the consent of ages were without weight, it was not to be expected that men should readily admit the claims of one which was at once both the newest and the oldest ; of one which, while it professed to belong to the very earliest age, had only been rediscovered in the last. It has been reserved to our own day to vindicate to these monuments that high degree of importance which is their due ; and if the present volume should help to spread the knowledge of them, and persuade those of our fellow-countrymen who have the opportunity, to become more intimately acquainted with them, it will not have been written in vain.

AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM.



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